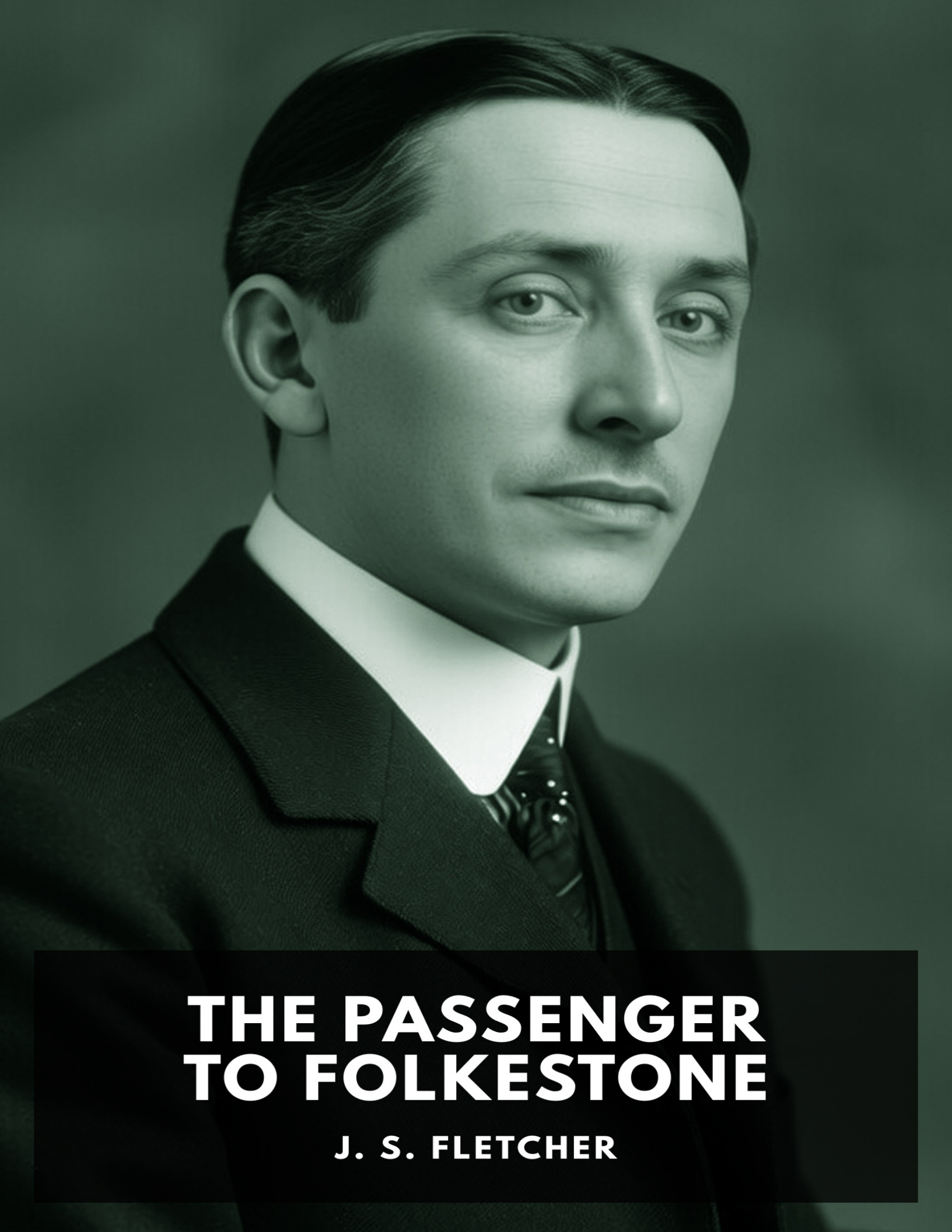

THE PASSENGER TO FOLKESTONE

J. S. FLETCHER

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1
Daniel the Dandy

All along the cliffs of Folkestone, at the rear of the famous promenade known as the Leas, runs a line of hotels and boardinghouses, the inmates of which, on favourable days, can (literally) look out of England into France. For the French coast is but some twenty miles away, and by day its headlands are plainly visible, and by night the lanterns of its lighthouses flash a greeting across the Channel. A pleasant place this, in which to spend a holiday, for it is full of sun on good days, and its air is mild as well as bracing, and there is something in the notion of its contiguity to the Continent that brings always a sufficiency of visitors to the hotels set high above its beach.

In one of those hotels, in the last week of October, 1922, there was staying, amongst other guests, a young gentleman from London, by name Roland Lawson, who had recently been ill, but had recovered from his illness sufficiently to be able to run down to the beach every morning before breakfast for a swim in the sea. On the morning of Tuesday, October 24, Lawson, as usual, came out of his hotel at 7.30, crossed the road to the promenade stretching between the houses and the edge of the Leas, and turning into one of the winding paths which lead down the shrub-grown cliffs, ran light-heartedly, with all the gladness of a man restored to health and strength, towards the beach. He ran singing, but at a turn in the path his singing stopped suddenly. So did his running, for there, right before him, at a few yards' distance, lay a man, face downward, motionless. And Lawson knew that man to be dead.

A discovery of this sort acts on one man in one way; in another way on another man. In this case, Lawson, for perhaps thirty seconds, stood stock still, staring. If he had any immediate mental impression, it was that something had suddenly dulled, had almost darkened the brightness of the crisp, sun-filled Autumn morning. But that was vague; the first real thing that he realised was the thumping of his own heart. At that, as if it had been a drum-call to action, he roused himself, and went forward, stealthily: he

knew that here was Death, and yet he tip-toed to the dead as if what he knew to be Death was only Sleep that one should not intrude on. He wanted to look closer, wanted to see he scarcely knew what; also, in that moment, he remembered that in all his five-and-twenty years of life he had never seen a dead man. And then, as he was almost close to the body, a step came, and a voice:

'Good God! What on earth's this?'

Lawson turned quickly, to see a man, young, alert, obviously crammed with healthy life, who, in hastily donned flannels and carrying bathing things and towels, had come close on him. At the sight of something so vigorously alive he came to himself.

'I don't know!' he answered, lamely. 'I—I only just caught sight of him. I think he's dead!'

The other man brushed past him, unceremoniously, and went close up to the figure stretched across the path. He bent over it.

'Dead?' he exclaimed. 'I should think he is dead! And been dead for many a long hour, too, I reckon! Look there!'

Lawson looked towards where the other pointed, and saw, stretching away from underneath the body and across the gravelled path, a dark, inch-wide viscous trickle that merged itself in a wide, still darker pool. He gave a sharp gasp at the sight of it, and his companion nodded.

'Of course!' he said, in matter-of-fact tones. 'Blood! Coagulated! This man must have been lying here, dead, all night. Wonder if it's a case of suicide?'

He bent still closer over the dead man, and suddenly started erect, stretching a finger towards a point between the shoulder-blades.

'No! Murder!' he exclaimed. 'Look there! He's been run clean through the heart from behind, and by no unpractised hand, either! That's been done with a rapier, or a sword stick! But let's look further at him. Give a hand!'

Lawson drew back, shaking his head. He had got over his first shock, and his brain was beginning to work again in its customary cool fashion.

'Better not touch him,' he said quietly. 'That's a job for the police—not for us. We must get them here at once. Leave him just as he is till—'

'Well, no harm in looking at him,' interrupted the other, bending still nearer to the dead man. 'Frenchman, obviously. Middle-aged. Well-dressed. And—look at it, on that outstretched hand!—with a magnificent

diamond ring on one finger! Whew! that thickens matters! Can't have been robbery—'

'Don't you think that, instead of jawing about it, it would be better if one of us ran to the police?' suggested Lawson. 'Shall I go, or will you? I daresay you'd make the quickest job of it—I'm only just through an illness, and—'

'Oh, I'll go!' exclaimed the other. 'There'll be a policeman somewhere about up there—if not, I'll telephone the police station. Perhaps that would be the best thing to do—no hunting about, then. I'll run up to my hotel.'

He threw aside his bathing things and towels, and darted away up the path, and Lawson prepared to wait. There was a seat close by, and he dropped into it, and sat, staring at the still figure. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes went by; then the sound of hurrying feet and the murmur of voices came from the road above, and looking round he saw the other man coming back at the head of what, on any other occasion, Lawson would have regarded as a curiously-mixed crowd. There was a police-inspector, and a police-sergeant, and two or three policemen, all in uniform; there were two or three men in plain clothes, carrying a stretcher; there were two men whom he instinctively took to be of the medical profession; there were some workmen, who had evidently followed the police party out of curiosity, and now stood a little in the tear, staring. But Lawson's gaze ran lightly over these, to fix itself on another man, who, judging him from his mere superficial appearance, seemed (to Lawson) to be singularly out of place on such an occasion. This was a young man of, apparently, thirty years of age, who, despite the fact that it was then little beyond eight o'clock in the morning, was carefully dressed and scrupulously groomed, and who was evidently one of those men who have a perfect taste in clothes and study every detail to a nicety. Lawson's first impression was of a beautifully made, perfectly fitting dark tweed suit, a silver-grey hat, smartened by a black band, the perfection of things in the way of neck and footwear, and of a feeling that here was a man who knew precisely how to dress like a gentleman, and prided himself on his knowledge. But the face under the smart hat was not that of a mere dandy. Lawson looked, attentively at it as its owner came up, ahead of the other men, and side by side with the inspector, and noted its characteristics—a square-cut, firm jaw, a pair of large, strangely lambent eyes, set deep below what was evidently a broad, high forehead. As for the rest of it, the

man's face was of a clear olive complexion rarely seen in England, and it was as scrupulously shaven as he himself was attired.

Within a minute of the arrival of the police party, Lawson knew that this was a person of importance. True, the inspector did the first questioning of him as discoverer of the dead man, but the other man stood by, watching him keenly and listening intently, and when the two doctors had made a superficial examination of the body, and it had been lifted up and placed on a stretcher, it was he who began an examination of the clothing. Lawson stood by, wondering at and somewhat admiring the way in which the slender fingers of this strange personage slipped from pocket to pocket of the dead man's clothing, and at the muttered comments which came from the firm-cut lips.

'Nothing removed from outer or inner pockets of lounge coat—all right! Nor from trousers' pockets or hip pocket at rear of trousers—very good—no need to remove anything from any pocket—all is there that one would expect to find there. Watch and chain—valuable—intact in waistcoat—rings on fingers—fine diamond on left hand—diamond and sapphire on left. Now this waistcoat pocket—just so. Small card-case—here's a card. *M. Louis Auberge*—with an address in Paris. And—also just so—in this waistcoat pocket, hastily thrust in, room-ticket of his hotel. *No. 91A, Royal Pavilion Hotel, Folkestone*. And this, with it, receipt for packet deposited in the hotel office. Very good—the rest is—'

He suddenly drew the inspector aside, whispered a few words to him, and, without further delay or as much as another glance at the dead man, went swiftly away down the path towards the road below. And Lawson turned to a policeman who stood by him.

'Who is that man?' he asked, indicating the retreating figure.

The policeman smiled, eyeing his questioner with something of humour in his eyes.

'Detective-Sergeant Daniel Perivale, sir,' he answered. 'Known in the force as Daniel the Dandy. But the dandy business—'

He broke off there, and went forward in response to a signal from the inspector who was directing the removal of the body.

2
Mr Marcus Hartmore

The Royal Pavilion Hotel at Folkestone fronts the Harbour Station and the quayside from which the Folkestone-Boulogne cross-channel steamship service is carried on. It is, accordingly, a highly convenient house of call, and has, indeed, grown out of all knowledge since the days of stage-coaches and packet-boats. It was then an old-fashioned hostelry; it is now a modern palatial hotel of vast size and area, with wide-spreading wings and a capacity of accommodating a small army of guests. Yet its entrance hall was quiet enough, when, at precisely nine o'clock, ten minutes after he had walked away from the group surrounding the body of the dead man, Detective-Sergeant Perivale marched into it and made his way to the counter of the reception office.

There was a man standing at that counter, a portly, bearded, middle-aged man, whom Perivale set down instantly as the type of a well-to-do man of business. He was leaning over the counter in conversation with the young lady reception clerk, and as Perivale advanced upon them he caught a reply which she was giving, evidently in answer to the bearded man's questions.

'I really don't know, Mr Hartmore!' she was saying. 'It's really most extraordinary! Nobody's seen anything at all of him this morning, and as far as we can find out, he wasn't seen in here last night, either, after he went out. I've made inquiries for you, and—' she paused at that, catching sight of Perivale, and turning to him—'excuse me a moment, Mr Hartmore. Yes, sir?' she went on, as the detective lifted his hat. 'What can I do for you?'

Perivale eyed her keenly as he answered her question. She was a clever-looking, pretty young woman, smart and alert; the thought flashed across him that she was the sort of girl who might prove of great use in his present task.

'I wish to inquire about Monsieur Louis Auberge,' he said, in clear, measured tones. 'Occupying, I believe, a room in this hotel. Do you know where he is?'

The reception-clerk arched her eyebrows, and inclined her head towards the bearded man.

'That's just what this gentleman was asking!' she replied. 'I don't! Monsieur Auberge booked a room here last night, went out soon afterwards, and appears not to have come in again. So—there it is!'

'You can describe him?' suggested Perivale.

'Yes—I was here, on duty, when he booked his room,' answered the reception clerk. 'Frenchman, of course. About middle-height, not exactly stout, but inclined that way. Dark complexion; dark moustache and pointed beard, French fashion. Wore dark coloured clothes—I noticed he went out without his overcoat—he'd left it upstairs, I think—and he'd a smart dark grey suit on, then. A well-dressed man—very neat in appearance.'

Perivale glanced at the bearded man, who was listening attentively.

As you were making inquiry about Monsieur Auberge, sir,' he said politely, 'I take it that you are a friend of his?'

'A business friend,' replied the other. 'I came here to meet him. I expected to meet him last night.'

Perivale looked round, caught the man and the girl into a comprehensive, warning glance, and lowered his voice.

'I may as well tell you, at once,' he whispered. 'Monsieur Auberge is dead! He was found dead, on the Leas, at half-past seven o'clock this morning!'

The bearded man started, pulling himself from his leaning attitude on the counter to his full height; the reception clerk stifled an exclamation of horrified surprise. Perivale gave her a sharp glance, but the glance passed to the man and fixed itself on him in a steady, watchful look.

'And, in plain truth,' continued Perivale. 'Monsieur Auberge has been murdered! Now we want to know something about Monsieur Auberge. You, sir, perhaps, can give me some information? As for myself, I'm a police officer: Detective-Sergeant Perivale.'

The bearded man drew a deep breath.

'My name's Hartmore,' he said. 'Marcus Hartmore—there's my name, and my address, in the register, right before you. I came here from town to meet Auberge. He came from Paris to meet me. That was to be—the meeting, I mean—last night. As I said before, I expected—'

Perivale interrupted him with a motion of his lifted hand.

‘Come where we can talk quietly, Mr Hartmore,’ he said. ‘The lounge, eh? There are quiet corners there, I believe. But stop!—one moment.’ He turned to the reception-clerk who was listening wide-eyed. ‘Just tell me all about Monsieur Auberge coming here last night,’ he continued. ‘The mere facts. And—’ he pulled out a small notebook—‘your name, if you please. I’ll make some shorthand notes.’

Oh, my name’s Shepperson!’ replied the girl, readily. ‘Adelaide Shepperson. About Monsieur Auberge—well, he came in here just about nine o’clock last night. That’s the time when people who’ve come across from France, from Boulogne, you know, do come in, if the boat’s running punctually—it’s due at the quay at eight-forty. Monsieur Auberge walked across, I suppose—anyway, he came in here, carrying a small suit-case and a travelling-rug, and asked for a room. I gave him Room 91A, and took him up to it myself. I told the hall porter to take his travelling-rug and the suit-case, but Monsieur Auberge motioned him away and carried them himself. I showed him the room and asked if there was anything he wished, at the same time ringing for the chambermaid. He sent her off, too, as she appeared at the door, and said there was nothing; the room would do excellently. So I left him, and in less than ten minutes he was down here again, without his overcoat, but with his hat on, asking mi to lock up for him in the office safe a packet which he gave me, a sealed packet, and to give him a receipt for it. I did so, and he went out through the front door. And as far as I can make out, that was the last that any of us saw of him. Of course, we didn’t know he’d never come in again! We knew nothing until Mr Hartmore came down here this morning and said that he’d knocked several times at Monsieur Auberge’s door, since he’d got up himself, and could get no answer. Mr Hartmore, of course, as he can tell you, had come here last night after Monsieur Auberge went out, and had inquired if he’d got here. I told him he had, and what the number of Monsieur Auberge’s room was; his own room is close by it.’

Perivale, who had been making shorthand notes, closed his book.

‘Thank you, Miss Shepperson,’ he said. ‘Very nice and clear. Now, Mr Hartmore,’ he went on, ‘supposing we have a little chat in the lounge. You found Auberge out when you got here?’ he proceeded, when they had got into a quiet corner. ‘I take it that you expected him to be in the hotel, waiting for you, when you arrived?’

‘I did!—in accordance with our letters arranging the interview,’ replied Hartmore. ‘I am pretty familiar with the service between this country and France, for I often go over to Paris myself. I knew he’d get here by the boat which leaves Boulogne at ten minutes past seven and reaches Folkestone at twenty minutes to nine, and I never dreamed that he’d go out of the hotel once he’d got into it. I thought I should find him enjoying a cigar after his late dinner, or supper.’

‘And you arrived here—at this hotel at what time, Mr Hartmore?’

‘Oh, well—it was rather later than I’d expected. But then, there’d been no fixed hour in my arrangement with Auberge: it was merely that we should meet here yesterday evening.’

‘Just so! But what time did you get here?’

‘It would be all about a quarter-to-eleven. I booked a room and asked for Auberge. They said he’d come, but was out. I waited perhaps half an hour; then I thought that perhaps he had friends in the town, and had gone to see them, so I went to bed. I rose this morning at a little before eight, and after I’d dressed, having got the number of his room, I went to the door and knocked, several times. As I got no reply, and couldn’t hear anything of him from the chambermaid, I went down to the office and was making inquiries there when you came. The rest you know—as far as I’m concerned!’

Perivale made no reply to the last remark. He was again rapidly making shorthand notes; the sudden appearance of Miss Shepperson caused him to pause, pencil arrested. Miss Shepperson came close to the two men.

‘I have been up to Monsieur Auberge’s room,’ she said in a low voice. ‘He certainly didn’t occupy it last night—I mean, the bed’s not been slept in!’

Perivale smiled indulgently.

‘We know that, Miss Shepperson,’ he answered. ‘Monsieur Auberge slept—elsewhere! A different sleep!’

‘Yes, but that’s not what I came to say,’ she went on. ‘I just mentioned that. The odd thing is—though perhaps it’s not odd—the key of his room is in the door!’

‘Outside or inside?’ asked Periyale.

‘Outside!’ replied Miss Shepperson. ‘Outside!’

Hartmore made a muttered exclamation.

‘I never noticed that!’ he added. ‘But that corridor’s a bit dark.’

‘Outside,’ remarked Perivale, ignoring Hartmore’s observation. ‘Then—anyone seeing it there could enter the room?’

‘Of course!’ replied Miss Shepperson. ’At any time last night, after he went out.’

‘Is the key still there?’ inquired Perivale.

‘No!’ said Miss Shepperson. ‘It’s here! I thought you would wish—’

‘You anticipate my wishes admirably,’ replied Perivale. ‘I do wish!’ He took the key, nodded his thanks to the reception clerk, and once more turned to his companion. ‘Now, Mr Hartmore,’ he said, quietly, ‘I hope you will see it in your way to answer a straight question which I’m going to put to you. Why did you and Auberge arrange to meet here last night?’

Hartmore turned to the detective, regarding him thoughtfully, and instead of replying, began to stroke his beard. Half a moment of silence went by; Perivale, responding to the other man’s watchful look, nodded at him.

‘I know what you’re thinking, Mr Hartmore,’ he said. ‘Just this—what has your business and Auberge’s to do with the fact of his murder? Exactly! But—eh?’

‘Something of that sort,’ said Hartmore. ‘And—what about your last word—But?’

‘But it may have everything to do with it!’ replied Perivale. ‘So—why not tell me? Remember—I’m a police officer!’

‘Does that mean—secrecy?’ asked Hartmore.

‘At present, things are between you and me,’ answered Perivale. ‘Here are the facts—the elementary facts. This Frenchman comes over here to meet you. He goes out of this hotel, never returns, and is found murdered—’

‘Are you sure it was murder?’ interrupted Hartmore.

‘Dead sure! I’ll hear more from the doctors later, but there’s no doubt it was murder—he’d been run clean through the heart from behind,’ replied Perivale. ‘Now, the first thing I want to know is—why did he come to Folkestone? To meet you!—that’s admitted. But—on what particular business? Tell me, Mr Hartmore—if you please.’

Before Hartmore could reply to this direct invitation, Miss Shepperson reappeared, conducting a man who looked as if he had been aroused from sleep against his will: certainly he had hurried on some clothing without much regard to his personal appearance. But the reception clerk introduced him with due ceremony.

‘Mr Perivale, this is Blackett, the night porter,’ she said. ‘I’ve had him called up to see if he can tell anything. He can!—not much, I think, but something. So—’

‘Good of you, Miss Shepperson!’ responded Perivale, with an admiring glance. ‘Well! and what can you tell, Blackett?’

The night porter pulled his wits together and drew nearer.

‘This French gentleman, sir, as the young lady’s been asking me about,’ he answered, in the tone of a man who imparts information under what seems to be mysterious circumstances. ‘I see him last night, sir!’

‘You did, eh? When, and where, Blackett?’

‘I ain’t properly on duty till ten o’clock, sir, but sometimes I comes earlier. Last night I was in the outer hall there a bit after nine, for no particular reason, as I knows on, but still there, and, of course, in my uniform. This here French gentleman, he comes away from the reception office, putting a bit of paper in his waistcoat pocket, and makes for the hall door. I opens it for him; he goes out. Next instant he’s back again, at me. “I may be out late,” he says—talked English as well as I do myself—“How do I get in again, if very late?” he says. “No trouble about that, sir,” says I. “I’m the night porter: on duty all night—nothing to do but ring the bell, sir,” I says. “Show me where the bell is in the entrance,” he says. “I do not know at what hour I may be in—perhaps one hour, perhaps two, perhaps three or four—but I shall be in.” So I shows him the bell, and off he goes.’

Which way did he go?’ asked Perivale.

‘Round towards the left, sir—the town way.’

‘And he never came in?’

Never, sir! Leastways, he hadn’t come in when I went off duty at a quarter to eight this morning.’

‘All right, Blackett—much obliged to you,’ said Perivale, with a nod of dismissal. ‘And to you, Miss Shepperson—that’s a bit of very useful information. Now, Mr Hartmore,’ he continued, as the reception clerk and the night porter retired, ‘we’ll resume our business. You’ll answer my question, won’t you? Why did Auberge come here to meet you?’

But Hartmore once more began to stroke his beard.

‘After hearing what I did just now, I don’t think my business with Auberge had anything to do with his murder,’ he answered. ‘It’s evident he had another appointment in Folkestone! Or why should he have gone out saying what he did to the night porter?’

‘Precisely!—but that may have had to do with your business!’ retorted Perivale. ‘Come, Mr Hartmore, help me to get things clear! It’ll have to come out! Tell me!’

Hartmore hesitated a moment longer; then he leaned across the table and lowered his voice.

‘Well!’ he said. ‘If you really must know, the reason of our meeting was to consult about the sale of an extraordinarily fine and valuable diamond!’

3
The Man Who Came Late

Upon hearing this announcement, Perivale laid his notebook and pencil on the table at which he and Hartmore were sitting, drew out a cigarette case from an inner pocket, and, after giving his companion a cigarette, lighted one himself, and for a full minute smoked in silence.

'That, Mr Hartmore,' he said at last, 'that—or something very like it—is precisely what I expected you to tell me. For though I only saw Auberge's dead body for a few minutes before coming along here, I formed the opinion that he was connected with the diamond trade. And you, of course, from what you've just told me, are in that trade yourself?'

'I am!' replied Hartmore. 'Auberge traded in diamonds in Paris; I trade in them in London—Hatton Garden. He and I have done business for some years, but we've very seldom met. This meeting was specially arranged.'

'I should like to hear the details,' suggested Perivale. 'But first, a question. You spoke just now of a very valuable diamond. Was it to be shown by you to Auberge, or by Auberge to you?'

'By Auberge to me!'

'Then—he was to bring it with him from Paris?'

'Exactly!'

'I made a preliminary search of his clothing,' said Perivale. 'There was nothing of that sort on him, unless he carried it in some secret pocket. However, I shall make a much more careful search, presently. Well, Mr Hartmore, if you'll tell me all about it—'

'The story is fairly simple,' replied Hartmore. 'About a fortnight ago Auberge wrote to me saying that he had been approached by a syndicate in Paris in respect of certain jewels, once the property of Russian notables, which had come into the hands of this syndicate. One was a particularly fine diamond, of great value, with, he gave me to understand, a history attached to it. In Auberge's opinion, there was more chance of a first-class sale for this diamond in England, or in America, than in France; at any rate, he

wished to consult me about it, and he offered to meet me either at Boulogne or at Folkestone to show me the diamond and discuss its sale. We fixed on Folkestone. The rest you know!'

'There are details,' said Perivale. 'Did Auberge give you any idea of the value of this diamond?'

'This much,' replied Hartmore. 'He said the syndicate wanted £25,000 for it. Anything that he and I could get above that figure was to be shared between us. He hinted that we might get £35,000.'

'You mean that he himself considered the diamond to be worth £35,000?'

'Yes, I took that to be his meaning.'

'Well, this syndicate, Mr Hartmore? Who are the members?'

Oh, that I know nothing about! No names were ever mentioned to me. Auberge merely said—a syndicate.'

'We shall have to get into communication with the men who form that syndicate anyway! But that's easily done. When I go back to the police station I shall wire Paris police and ask them to notify the Paris press of Auberge's murder. That'll bring this syndicate into touch. You have Auberge's address in Paris, of course?'

'Of course! He had a small office—no more than a couple of rooms—in the Rue de Caumartin. A modest affair—I have called there once or twice. But I think he did most of his business elsewhere.'

'Anyway, I suppose he had a clerk, or clerks, who will be found at that address?'

'I never saw any clerk there.'

'Do you know if he was a married man?'

'I don't! I know nothing about his private affairs.'

'Well—the Paris police will see to all that. Now, the first thing, Mr Hartmore, is this. You really believe that once he came here last night Auberge would have that diamond on him or in his luggage, whatever that amounted to?'

'I do! That's what he came for!'

Perivale picked up the key which Miss Shepperson had handed over.

'Then come up with me to his room,' he said. 'We'll see if we can discover anything—of any sort!'

Hartmore shook his head as they rose from their seats.

'I don't think that's likely,' he remarked. 'He wouldn't leave that diamond in his room. While we've been talking I've had an idea—there may

be something in it; there may be nothing. Just this—that he may have deposited the diamond with some person in this town.'

'I've had the same idea,' said Perivale. 'Still—I've got to see that room and what he left in it.'

Room 91A turned out to be a single bedroom on the first floor; a room the window of which overlooked the harbour. At first sight there was nothing unusual in its appearance. Everything was neat and tidy. Behind the door hung a dark overcoat; over the back of a chair hung a travelling rug; on a stand at the foot of the bed rested a smart suit-case of black morocco leather, the fittings of which were of silver. Nothing had been laid out on the dressing table, nor on the washstand; everything appeared to corroborate Miss Shepperson's statement that Monsieur Auberge, after being shown to his room, had spent very little time there before once more presenting himself at the reception office.

'It is clear,' said Perivale, after a glance round the apartment, 'quite clear that Auberge, after Miss Shepperson left him in this room, spent no time in unpacking his suit-case. Yet he was here for some minutes. What did he do during that time? He would not stand or sit here doing nothing, for it is obvious that he was more or less impatient to go out. What did he do? Let us see if we can get some idea.'

He rang the bell, and then opened the door a little way. A chambermaid came, full of curiosity; Perivale beckoned her into the room.

'Were you on duty when Miss Shepperson showed the French gentleman up to this room last night?' he inquired.

'I was, sir!'

'Did you bring him hot water?'

'No, sir. Miss Shepperson asked him if he'd like hot water, or if there was anything he wanted, and he said there was nothing—he motioned me away, sir.'

'Did you come to his room again?'

'Not till this morning, sir.'

'How did you get in?'

'Well, sir, the gentleman had left his key in the door.'

'Did you notice anything when you came in.'

'I saw at once, sir, that the bed hadn't been slept in.'

Perivale turned, pointing to the washstand.

'Had he washed his hands there?' he asked. 'Be sure, now!'

'No, sir! Everything in the room was just as it had been before Miss Shepperson showed him up—except for that suit-case and the overcoat and rug.'

'That'll do!' said Perivale, and closed the door again as the chambermaid left. 'Now,' he went on, turning to Hartmore. 'Once more—what did Auberge do during the few minutes he was in this room? He didn't unpack; he didn't wash his hands! It's inconceivable that he did nothing! What, then, did he do?'

'What do you suppose he did?' asked Hartmore.

'I think he did something with that diamond,' replied Perivale, decisively. 'I think he either transferred it from one pocket to another, or hid it somewhere in this room! Anyhow—though not at present—I'll have this room searched from floor to ceiling! And in the meantime we'll examine the suit-case.'

He picked up the suit-case from its stand as he spoke, and, laying it on the bed pressed the levers on either side of the handle.

'As I expected—unlocked!' he muttered. 'He didn't bother to lock it—if it was locked—after going through the Customs across there, on landing. We shall find nothing in this, Mr Hartmore—except what I expect to find. Here you are—a couple of Paris newspapers—a Paris magazine—silk sleeping suit—suit of clothes—shirts—collars—socks—neckties—handkerchiefs—slippers—toilet things—no papers—no anything of any importance! And there'll be nothing in the overcoat—there isn't, except a handkerchief, a muffler, and a pair of gloves. All that is precisely what I thought—it comes to nothing. And now I'm going to lock up this room, give strict orders that no one is to enter it until I come back with some assistance, and in giving those orders ask at the office to see the packet which Auberge deposited there before he went out.'

Hartmore followed him out of the room, and watched him lock the door.

'I've been wondering why you didn't ask for that sealed packet sooner,' he said. 'The diamond may be in that!'

'I would cheerfully stake a thousand pounds to a penny that it is not,' replied Perivale as he marched along the corridor. 'All the same, we will take a look at the packet.'

'Would it—the thought just crosses my mind—would it be within your province to open it?' inquired Hartmore. 'Considering what is at stake—'

Perivale gave him a quick glance out of his eye-corners.

‘I’m not the sort to stick at trifles, Mr Hartmore!’ he said. ‘Once that packet is in my hands—’

‘If the diamond is in it—’ suggested Hartmore.

‘Just so!—the diamond had better be out of it, and deposited at some bank, until this syndicate comes along. But—we’ll see. So far, we don’t know what sort of a packet it is that we’re speculating about.’

Two minutes later, they knew. Miss Shepperson, under instructions from the management, unlocked a safe and presented to the detective what appeared to be no more than a stout linen-lined envelope which obviously contained no more than a few sheets of paper. The envelope was blank; it had no seal—and Perivale stared at it in astonishment.

‘Did he say anything about this?’ he asked, abruptly. ‘Say what it was?’

‘He said nothing!’ replied Miss Shepperson. ‘He merely asked me to lock that up in the safe, and to give him a receipt for it.’

‘What did you take it to be?’ inquired Perivale.

‘Well—I thought it might contain banknotes—possibly for large amounts. It—I thought it felt like that.’

Perivale had two fingers in his waistcoat pocket. Suddenly, before those standing near could realise what he was doing, he drew out a small ivory paper-cutter, and with one swift movement slit open the flap of the envelope. The next instant he had drawn out several sheets of thin, but tough letter paper, had smoothed them flat, and was eagerly bending over them.

‘Cypher!’ he exclaimed. ‘The whole lot—in cypher!’ He turned to Hartmore. ‘Do you know anything of it?—has it anything to do with the business you mentioned?’

Hartmore, too, bent over the sheets of paper. His shake of the head as he raised himself again was decisive.

‘Utterly meaningless to me!’ he replied. ‘A mere jumble of letters!’

‘Well, that’s what it is!’ agreed Perivale. ‘But the jumble extends to—let’s see—three, four, five closely typed pages! Somebody, of course, could decode this—but who? You never used any cypher in your communications with him?’

‘Never! Never used any cypher in my life!’ declared Hartmore. ‘Whatever that is, it’s nothing to do with any transaction of mine.’

Perivale put the sheets of paper back in the envelope, and, turning to Miss Shepperson, asked her for an envelope of larger size and some sealing-wax.

‘Put that back in your safe,’ he said, when he had finished his operations. ‘It’ll be wanted again, of course, but it’s safe with you in the meantime. And please don’t allow anyone to enter Room 91A until I return with the inspector—I’m going to search that room thoroughly. That’s all—just now—except that before I go I should like to look through your register of yesterday.’

Miss Shepperson pointed to the open pages of a big book which lay close by.

‘There you are!’ she said. ‘Left-hand page.’

Perivale drew the book to him, and began to read the various entries. Presently he motioned Hartmore to his side.

‘A good many people seem to have come into this hotel during yesterday,’ he remarked in a low voice. ‘See if any of these names suggest anything to you.’

Hartmore nodded, and followed Perivale’s finger as it moved slowly down the page. He made no sign, and he said nothing, and Perivale, as he came to the end began to murmur the names aloud.

‘Louis Auberge, Paris. Marcus Hartmore, Hatton Garden, London.’ The entries on that page ended there, and he glanced upward to a single line and entry at the top of the next. ‘One more after your arrival, Mr Hartmore!’ he said. ‘Mr Ecks, London! Um!’ He turned to Miss Shepperson, who had returned the packet to the safe and come back to the counter. ‘This last entry, Miss Shepperson? Mr Ecks, London. Who is Mr Ecks?’

Miss Shepperson came nearer, glancing at the register.

‘Mr Ecks?’ she replied. ‘A gentleman who came in very late last night, and left very early this morning!’

4
The Mysterious Lady

Hartmore turned slowly on the detective as the reception clerk answered his question, and saw a sudden gleam of new interest in his eyes. Just as sudden was the way in which Perivale turned back to the office counter; a second previously he had seemed impatient to get away; now he appeared just as anxious to stop.

'Mr Ecks, of London! Came in very late last night, and left very early this morning, eh?' he said quietly. 'That sounds interesting! Were you here when he came in, Miss Shepperson?'

'I was! I was here in this office unusually late last night,' replied Miss Shepperson. 'I gave Mr Ecks a room—No. 93B.'

'That's still more interesting—for it would be close to the room you'd assigned to Monsieur Auberge,' remarked Perivale. 'Did you take Mr Ecks up to it?'

'No—the hall porter took him up.'

'Well—tell about Mr Ecks! All you know. Describe him—and let me hear all about his coming.'

'There was nothing remarkable about his coming—nothing, at any rate, that one is unused to in hotel business. He was a quiet-looking, gentlemanly man of perhaps thirty-five, fair-haired, fair moustache, wearing tinted spectacles. Well dressed, good manners. He came in here just before eleven o'clock, said he was unexpectedly obliged to stay in Folkestone for the night, and asked for a room. He added that he had no luggage, and would give me a deposit. He pulled out a handful of Treasury notes, and gave me a pound note and a ten shilling note, saying that they would no doubt cover his bill for the room and breakfast. He went straight up to the room. A glass of hot milk was booked to him—he must have got that through the hall porter, who took him up. He had tea taken to him at a quarter to seven this morning, and at seven o'clock he went out, saying to a porter at the door that he'd paid his bill and shouldn't be back.'

'No breakfast, then?' suggested Perivale.

'Beyond the tea and bread-and-butter, which the chambermaid got him, no!' replied Miss Shepperson. 'As to paying his bill, he never asked for it. There's a balance due to him, of course, and—'

But Perivale nodded, and, touching Hartmore on the shoulder, drew him away into the entrance hall.

'You heard her description of Mr Ecks?' he said. 'Does it fit in with your recollection of anybody?'

'No!' declared Hartmore. 'It didn't remind me of anybody I know!'

'Ecks is a capital name!' remarked Perivale, with a smile. 'It was probably his way of writing down X. Now the dictionaries describe X as first unknown quantity, incalculable or mysterious factor or influence, and so on—eh? Well, I'll have to find this Mr Ecks, and I may as well set that job going! But you, Mr Hartmore?—you remain here till we know more?'

'It's inconvenient,' replied Hartmore. 'I ought to be in town this afternoon.'

'Stay twenty-four hours!' urged Perivale. 'By then, you'll see, the members of that syndicate you mentioned will be over—I'm going to wire the Paris police just now. Remember the value of that diamond!'

'Very well!' said Hartmore. 'If you think they'll come—'

'I think you'll find that some responsible person will come as soon as the news of Auberge's murder reaches Paris, and that'll be before noon,' replied Perivale. 'I must be off, now—do you, Mr Hartmore, do anything you can to find anything out, here, or elsewhere—I shall be back within an hour or two.'

He hurried away on that, and finding a taxicab at the corner of the hotel, jumped into it and hastened to the police headquarters and into the presence of the inspector who had seen to the removal of Auberge's dead body. The inspector listened to Perivale's summary of his morning's work with quiet curiosity. Then he pointed to a little heap of articles which lay on his desk, covered by a white handkerchief.

'There's everything there that was in his clothing,' he remarked. 'I made a thorough search myself after we'd got him to the mortuary. Robbery wasn't the motive—unless it was the diamond—for he'd a lot of money and valuables on him, all untouched. There are a few papers—nothing of any importance. And I've anticipated you, Perivale: I've already wired to the Paris police, and full particulars, too.'

‘The doctors?’ asked Perivale.

‘They say he was run through the heart, from behind, with some such weapon as a rapier, probably a sword stick,’ replied the inspector. ‘Instantaneous, of course! Must have been followed. But this man Ecks—we must make inquiries about him. I’ll set two or three to work—they can begin round the hotel; somebody must have seen him leave, and he seems fairly easy to trace. But I may as well tell you that while you’ve been down there I’ve had some information that you must hear—it has a distinct bearing on what you’ve learnt at the Royal Pavilion.’ He touched a bell on his desk; a policeman with a pen behind his ear answered it. ‘Send Neate here,’ he said. Then, turning to Perivale, he added, ‘Neate was on duty last night down by the harbour station—an observant, dependable chap, and not at all an imaginative one—if he says he saw a thing, you may be confident that he did see it!’

Another policeman came in—a fresh-coloured, sandy-haired, blue-eyed fellow of twenty-eight or thirty, of whom it might have been safely predicted that before he had been a policeman he had followed the plough; a sturdy, typical young countryman. He looked inquiringly at his superior; speculatively at Perivale.

‘Sit down, Neate,’ said the inspector. ‘I want you to tell Detective-Sergeant Perivale what you told me an hour ago. Neate,’ he went on, turning to the detective, ‘has seen the murdered man’s body. He recognised it at once as that of a man he saw last night. Now, Neate, where did you see this man?’

‘When I was on duty, sir, down by the harbour station.’

‘What time was that?’

‘A bit before nine o’clock, sir—when I first saw him.’

‘And whereabouts was he when you saw him?’

‘Coming across from the station, sir.

‘Alone?’

‘No, sir. There was a lady with him.’

The inspector looked at Perivale. And Perivale, after looking Neate steadily over, took up the questioning.

‘You’re quite sure that the man you’ve seen in the mortuary this morning is the man you saw last night?’ he asked.

‘Quite sure, sir! I knew him at once.’

‘Well, this lady? What was she like?’

‘Tall lady, sir. I couldn’t see much of her face; she was that wrapped up about her head and shoulders—furs and suchlike, sir. But I do know that I’ve seen her before—here in the town!’

‘You’re sure of that, Neate?’

‘Positive, sir! I’ve seen the lady before—several times. But I’ve no idea who she is, sir.’

‘Well, last night? What did you see—further?’

‘The lady and gentleman, sir, walked straight to the entrance to the Royal Pavilion Hotel. There’s a path that leads up to the door from right in front of the approach to the harbour station. They stood talking for a minute or so at the entrance of that path; then the gentleman hurried into the hotel and the lady began to walk up and down. She walked up and down along the front of the hotel for, I should say, ten minutes or a quarter of an hour; then the gentleman came out and joined her, and they walked away together.’

‘In which direction, Neate?’

‘They crossed the road at the corner of the hotel, sir, and went through the alley that leads to the bottom of High Street.’

‘Did you notice anything about the man when he came out of the hotel?’

‘Well, I noticed that he’d got rid of his portmanteau, and a rug he was carrying, and his overcoat, sir. No more than that.’

‘Was the lady carrying anything?’

‘A small handbag, sir.’

‘It looked to you as if she’d come off the boat, too?’

‘I took it that they’d both come off the boat, sir—it was just in.’

‘And you feel absolutely certain that you’d seen this lady before, here in Folkestone?’

‘Yes, sir—I’m quite certain. She’d a—what I should call a fine way of walking, sir. A—a sort of distinguished lady, sir.’

‘T’see, Neate. Something out of the common, eh? Have you any idea, now, of where you’ve seen her before?’

‘May have been down by the harbour, sir—I’m often on duty there, about the time the boats come in from France.’

‘And, of course, you’d know her again if you saw her today, or next week, or next month?’

‘Oh yes, sir!’

‘Well, you keep your eyes open, and your ears, too!’ said Perivale. ‘And if you see or hear of her—you know what to do. That’s pretty reliable,’ he

added to the inspector, when the policeman had gone. 'Auberge was in the company of this woman last night, after he left the hotel. That would be about a quarter-past nine. Now, have the doctors given you any idea as to what time Auberge was murdered?'

'Approximately, yes,' replied the inspector. 'They think—can't be dead certain about it, of course, but they seemed mutually agreed and pretty assured—that he was murdered about half-past ten. Certainly between that and eleven o'clock.'

Perivale remained thinking, silent and abstracted for awhile.

'I wish you'd go down to the hotel with me, to make a thorough examination of that room!' he said at last. 'I can't account for the few minutes that Auberge spent in it except on the theory that he used them to secrete that diamond! Why should he have stayed there, even a moment, when he didn't want anything? He didn't want to unpack; he didn't even want to wash his hands! He need not have gone up to the room at all—why should he? And—there was a lady waiting for him outside, and Frenchmen are very polite. Yet—he went up! And he remained in that room for several minutes. Something tells me that he hid the diamond there! Come on—let's go and look for it!'

The inspector pointed to the little heap of articles under the handkerchief.

'Hadn't you better examine—'

'Let that wait!' said Perivale. 'Any time! Lock them up!'

He hurried his companion down to the hotel, and, taking him up to Auberge's room, locked the door and waved a hand with a comprehensive gesture.

'I've so got it on my brain that Auberge hid that diamond in this room, inspector,' he said with a laugh that was almost dismal, 'that I propose to examine every inch of the place! I don't know what it is—instinct, intuition, any confounded sense you like, but I do believe the thing's here, somewhere! So—every inch, square or cubic!'

'No need for that, Perivale,' replied the inspector. 'There are plenty of inches here that you can see all at a go! Likely places, first. Let's figure it out. We'll say he wanted to hide the diamond for a few hours, while he was out. Very good, lots of nooks and corners where you could pop a small thing like that! Ledges over the doorways—corners under the carpets—a ledge in the chimney. Between the mattresses of the bed—that's a good place for stowing a thing—I've known of that, often. Obvious things first, anyhow!'

'My motto is—thorough!' said Perivale, grimly. 'Well—let's start.'

As an earnest of his intentions he took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves; the inspector, somewhat amused, followed his example. Each set to work in silence; save for an occasional remark or suggestion that silence remained unbroken during the next two hours. Then the inspector groaned.

'Perivale!' he said. 'I want something to eat and to drink. And it strikes me we're busy on a job that's not going to produce anything!'

'There's no end to do yet,' retorted Perivale. He rose from his knees in a corner of the room and rang the bell. 'We'll get a waiter here, and tell him to bring us some sandwiches and whatever you want to drink—oh, yes, there's lots to do, still!'

The waiter came, went, came again with a tray; the inspector dropped into an easy chair and ate and drank comfortably. Perivale, flitting backward and forward between the tray and his corner, munched and sipped and went on with his work. When he had finished eating and drinking the inspector began to smoke. Perivale, now down on his knees in another corner, resumed his labours; for two more hours Perivale kept him at them. But between four and five o'clock, when the autumn afternoon was declining towards dusk, Perivale gave in—he had found nothing.

'All the same,' he said, as he and the inspector left the room after carefully locking the door again, 'I believe that confounded diamond *is* in there—somewhere! And Monsieur Auberge was a damned clever chap to hide it so well! Inspector—I'll lay any odds it's there! You'll see—some day!'

The inspector said nothing. He and Perivale went back to headquarters, the inspector tired out. But Perivale was still inclined to activity.

'Let me see the few papers you mentioned as having been found on Auberge,' he said.

'Not much,' he added as the inspector produced what looked to be a thin packet of letters. 'Ah! here's the letter from Hartmore, making the appointment. And—ah! what's this? Inspector!—here's something that may be significant. Monsieur Auberge did *not* come here direct from Paris!'

5
The Head-Waiter

The inspector came slowly across the room and glanced inquisitively at the paper which Perivale held up to him.

'Yes?' he said inquiringly. 'How do you make that out? And if you didn't, what particular significance is attached to it?'

'According to Hartmore,' replied Perivale, 'Auberge came direct from Paris to Folkestone. I'm quite certain, from what Hartmore told me that he, Hartmore, believed that Auberge had travelled straight through from Paris yesterday. Well, here's proof that Hartmore was wrong in thinking so! This is a bill, of the Hotel Crystal at Boulogne, showing that Monsieur Louis Auberge stayed there Sunday night! Look at this. He dined there, alone, Sunday night; he occupied a room there Sunday night; he had his coffee there Monday morning. And—most important fact of all, to me, he had a guest at déjeuner there on Monday noon, and later on that guest had afternoon tea with him there! Who was that guest?'

'Might know a hundred people in Boulogne, for all we know,' muttered the inspector. 'Who can say?'

'The people at the Hotel Crystal can say,' replied Perivale. 'But I think it was the lady who, in Neate's opinion, came off the boat with him. Anyway, Auberge, while he was at that Hotel Crystal, Sunday and Monday, met somebody—and Auberge, at the time, had that diamond on him. Inspector, I shall cross over tomorrow morning and pick the scent up at the Hotel Crystal!'

'The scent begins in Paris!' observed the inspector.

'Not for me! The scent for me begins at Boulogne! From the Gare du Nord, there is no scent! Auberge is safe in the train. But the instant he steps out of the train, at Boulogne, the scent begins to be thick—for me, at any rate. Why did he break his journey at Boulogne? Who was the person he entertained to lunch on Monday? I must go across! this is one of those cases where you've got to hark back!'

‘They all are—seems to me!’ said the inspector, wearily. ‘The beginnings of most of ’em are like the origin or birth or antecedents of that chap Thackeray wrote about—wrapped in mystery. Well—do just what you think best, Perivale. Across by the eleven boat and back by the seven, eh? Is that it? And—in the meantime?’

‘In the meantime try to get some trace of Mr Ecks and of the lady described by Neate as something out of the common,’ replied Perivale. ‘You’ve got more or less graphic descriptions of both.’

‘Stiff job!’ muttered the inspector. ‘As for Mr Ecks, whoever he may be, you may bet your life he’s in London by this time—aye, and hours ago. A man who leaves his hotel at seven o’clock in the morning has a reason. My opinion is that Mr Ecks’ reason was the seven forty-six train to Victoria. As for the woman—well, there are a mighty lot of tall, graceful, good-looking women in Folkestone!’

‘Well—try!’ said Perivale. ‘After all, as regards the woman, don’t forget that Neate said he’d seen her in the town and would know her again. Let Neate loose about the streets; give him a roving commission for the next two or three days—I think he’s a sharp eye.’

‘Well, there may be a bit of a chance as regards the woman,’ admitted the inspector. ‘But you’ve got to remember this, Perivale. Since soon after nine o’clock this morning, the news of the murder has been all over the town. Everybody knows about it, everybody’s talking about it. I should say that there isn’t a soul in Folkestone who doesn’t know of it—hundreds, if not thousands of people have been to the Leas to stare at the place where the murder was committed. So, if that woman’s a resident, she knows. If her companionship with Auberge last night was of an innocent sort, why hasn’t she come forward? My belief is that she, too, is off. So, as I say, it’s a stiff job!’

‘One can only try,’ replied Perivale. ‘Now, I’m going! You’ll not see me again until I get back from Boulogne tomorrow night. But before I go, let me have a thorough look through Auberge’s clothes. There might be a secret pocket.’

‘There isn’t!’ said the inspector, with emphasis. ‘I thought of that myself. I’ve been over every inch of the stuff—coat, waistcoat, trousers. You needn’t waste your time.’

Perivale wasted no more. He went home to his rooms, changed his clothes, ate his dinner, spent his evening in reading a sentimental novel,

shed a tear or two over its last pages, and at precisely eleven o'clock laid his head on his pillow and fell fast asleep. Twelve hours later he stood on the deck of the cross-Channel steamer *Biarritz*, and after seeing the English coast fade, turned to watch the French coast come in sight. And presently arriving at Boulogne, he walked briskly away from the landing stage, marched along the dusty quay and over the bridge, and going straight to the Hotel Crystal, turned into the salle à manger and gave himself up to a consideration of the menu.

There were not many people in there: Perivale, after inspecting them, found no interest in any. His interest lay in the head-waiter, who, Perivale having visited the Hotel Crystal several times in recent years, remembered and welcomed him. Out of that head-waiter Perivale hoped to get some information, and when he had finished eating he asked him to bring him his coffee and liqueur into the salon himself. The man came there; Perivale was alone, and he closed the door.

'You remember me?' he said, in French.

The head-waiter bowed smilingly.

'Perfectly, monsieur! But monsieur has not been to see us of late.'

'It is eight months ago,' replied Perivale. 'Still, I am an old customer. And you would doubtless rejoice to do me a service?'

The head-waiter spread his hands generously; as he dropped them to a normal position, Perivale slipped a folded note into the right palm.

'Attend, then!' he said. 'Between ourselves, I wish to know what guests you had in this house on Sunday and Monday. You will understand that it is of the utmost importance I should know—it is not from curiosity that I inquire.'

'I understand monsieur perfectly,' replied the head-waiter. 'There were not many—it is not, monsieur comprehends, the season for visitors. A family, monsieur, staying here for the weekend on their way from England—papa, mamma, three children; they are of no interest to monsieur? Well, then, an Englishman, Monsieur Ecks.'

'When did he come?'

'On Saturday, monsieur—from Paris. A tourist, monsieur understands—one of the sort that goes about with a guidebook in his hand.'

'How long did he stay?'

'Until Monday evening, monsieur—the evening boat to Folkestone.'

'Had he baggage with him?'

‘Two pieces, monsieur—brown leather portmanteaux—good quality.’

‘What sort of man was he?’

‘Of the quiet, unobtrusive type, monsieur—always, when not out, reading his books. A person who seemed to be, perhaps, a professor—with large, tinted spectacles, monsieur. Decidedly a retiring person, but generous.’

‘Well?’ said Perivale, after a pause. ‘The others?’

‘There were two commercial travellers, monsieur—I know them well. One from Paris; the other from Amiens. Monsieur would find no interest in them. And there was a gentleman who has never been here before, at least, not in my time, and I am here several years, monsieur. A Monsieur Louis Auberge, from Paris.’

‘And he came—when?’

‘Sunday, monsieur. In the afternoon, by automobile—the car drove away after setting him down. About five o’clock, that was.’

‘I am interested,’ said Perivale. ‘Tell about him!’

Not that there is much to tell, monsieur—save one episode of the most interesting! Monsieur Auberge dined here that evening, and afterwards went out, returning at perhaps ten o’clock. I served him coffee myself next morning, Monday, in his room. He did not come down until late—perhaps twelve o’clock. Then he informed me that he expected a friend to déjeuner at one o’clock, and consulted with me about the wine. At one o’clock he brought into the salle à manger a lady.’

‘Do you know how she arrived?’ inquired Perivale.

‘I heard, monsieur, Like himself—by car.

‘Had she baggage?’

‘A small bag, monsieur, which she could carry herself. A handsome piece, that—silver mounted.’

‘You can describe her?’

‘I paid great attention to her, monsieur! A woman who had been of great beauty; indeed, still beautiful, but who looked as if she had suffered much. Probably, monsieur, of forty years of age. Tall—a perfect figure—dark hair and eyes—a most graceful carriage, and of manners the most gracious and refined. In short, monsieur—but monsieur understands met’

‘I understand! And this Monsieur Auberge?—did he show her—what?’

‘The greatest respect and attention, monsieur. Not, monsieur understands, the respect and attention of a lover, but the deference of a gentleman towards a lady for whom he has the highest esteem. Nothing, monsieur,

could have exceeded his politeness to her. She had a most beautiful voice, monsieur!'

'You interest me more than I can say!' remarked Perivale. 'Well, this one episode of the most interesting? What of it?'

'This, monsieur! After déjeuner, Monsieur Auberge requested me, as monsieur himself has just done, to bring coffee and liqueurs into this salon. I did so, some minutes later. Monsieur Auberge and madame were seated side by side there, near the window, and Monsieur Auberge was exhibiting something to her which he held in the palm of his left hand. For perhaps twenty seconds I saw it, monsieur!—ah, I never thought to see such a superb object! Monsieur, it was a magnificent diamond!'

'You knew it to be a diamond?'

'What else, monsieur? I have a brother who is in a jeweller's establishment! Oh yes, a truly magnificent example!'

'And Monsieur Auberge was showing it openly?'

'As I say, monsieur; in the palm of his left hand!'

'Were there any other persons in the room at the time?'

'Only Mr Ecks, monsieur. He stood there, by the fireplace, lighting his cigarette.'

'Could he see the diamond?'

'There was no reason why he should not, monsieur! Anyone in the room could have seen it. But Mr Ecks was the only person present—other than myself.'

'Well, what did you see further of Monsieur Auberge and the lady?'

'They remained in this room, conversing, the greater part of the afternoon, monsieur. At five o'clock they moved into the hall—monsieur has observed the comfort of the lounge there!—and then they had tea: English fashion. And at about a quarter past six they left for the boat.'

'Together? '

'Together, monsieur.'

'And Mr Ecks?'

'He had left previously—perhaps a quarter of an hour before.'

'Did you ever see Mr Ecks in conversation with Monsieur Auberge, at any time during their stay in the hotel?'

'Never, monsieur! Each seemed to be reserved, reticent. No, monsieur, I never saw them exchange a word!'

Perivale remained silent for a moment or two. Then he gave the head-waiter a frank look.

'Well!' he said. 'You'll learn it from the newspapers, so I may as well tell you! Monsieur Auberge was murdered the night he got to Folkestone! And his diamond has disappeared. He was last seen with a lady who corresponds with your description of the lady who was with him here. Now, did you ever hear her name, or her Christian name, or any name, mentioned?'

But the head-waiter had not heard any name mentioned. And he was horrified, shocked, desolated to hear monsieur's news. Murder!—and the diamond, a gem of the most rare, gone! It was unbelievable.

'True, nevertheless,' said Perivale. 'You have, of course, no knowledge as to where Monsieur Auberge went after dinner on Sunday evening?'

'None, monsieur! Doubtless to some place of entertainment. And monsieur gives it as the fact that this unfortunate gentleman so full of life and gaiety here with his so charming friend at noon on Monday was that very night—murdered? Eh, well, monsieur, life is full of strange problems!'

'This is a problem, of a certainty,' said Perivale. 'Well, then, you have given me some help in it. My object is to find Mr Ecks—and Madame.'

The head-waiter gazed at him with an expression half-deferential, half-inquisitive.

'Monsieur is of the police?' he suggested.

'Between ourselves—yes,' replied Perivale. 'And in charge of this case. But you will be secret?'

'Monsieur may rely on my discretion,' said the head-waiter. 'I hope to be of further use to monsieur. It is very interesting!'

And very puzzling, thought Perivale, as he strolled about the streets of Boulogne that autumn afternoon, killing time. For he had done his work there; the next job was across the twenty-five miles' strip of sea. He was impatient to get back, and was on the boat again half an hour before it was due to start. And he had not been on it long when a young man in a steward's uniform came up to him, diffidently.

'Beg your pardon, Mr Perivale, sir!' he said, 'but can I have a word with you? About that murder, Mr Perivale!'

6
One Woman—Three Men

Perivale turned sharply on the steward, giving him a steady scrutinising look. The steward was an alert, smart fellow who returned the look with confidence.

'Who are you?' demanded Perivale.

'Name of Charles Luck,' answered the steward. 'Folkestone man, sir. I know you, Mr Perivale, well enough, by sight. Saw you coming over this morning, sir, and wanted to speak to you then, but didn't get the chance.'

'Well—speak now!' said Perivale. 'What do you know about this affair?'

'Nothing about the affair itself, sir, but something about the French gentleman,' replied Luck. 'I'm quite certain I saw him on this boat, sir, on Monday evening. I read a description of him in the papers, this morning, before we left Folkestone, and I recognised it as relating to a man I certainly saw that night. What's more, Mr Perivale, he was on the boat with a Folkestone lady that I know well enough by sight. He came on board with her here at Boulogne; I saw him with her all the way across, and I saw them leave the boat together when we got to Folkestone.'

'Well, and who is the lady?' asked Perivale.

'A Mrs Volstroem, sir, who keeps a dressmaker's shop in Rendezvous Street,' answered Luck. 'Modiste she calls herself—fashionable dressmaker she really is. Started a business there two or three years ago. I know, because my young lady's employed there.'

'Can you describe Mrs Volstroem?' inquired Perivale.

'Yes, sir. Tall, handsome woman, the sort you'd notice at once wherever you met her. Dark—been a beauty in her time, I should say, and rare good-looking still!' said Luck. 'Not an Englishwoman, I think, Mr Perivale—at least, my girl says she isn't, though she's never been able to make out what she is. Speaks English like a native, though.'

'And you say this Mrs Volstroem has a place in Rendezvous Street?'

‘351, Rendezvous Street, sir, is the address. Only, that isn’t the name over the shop front. The name there, Mr Perivale, is *Leonie: Modiste*. It’s one of those new-fangled artistic sort of places, sir—sage green curtains in the window, and perhaps a couple of smart gowns. High-class style, sir!’

‘I see!’ said Perivale. ‘All right, Luck—much obliged to you. But now—have you said anything to your young lady about this?’

‘I haven’t, sir; I haven’t seen her since Sunday morning. She did tell me then that Mrs Volstroem was away in Paris for a few days.’

‘Well, don’t say anything to her, nor to anybody else till you’ve seen me again,’ said Perivale. ‘Keep this strictly to yourself. Your young lady may be useful to me—I’ve got this case in hand. Give me your address, Luck.’

He wrote down the steward’s address in his notebook, added another word of caution, and went off to the dining saloon, well pleased with the result of his investigations. And he would know more that night—the boat would be in at Folkestone at twenty minutes to nine; by nine o’clock he would be at Mrs Volstroem’s place. But—would he find her there?

Ruminating over the possibilities which might develop out of this chance revelation, Perivale began his dinner, and after his usual method when he was in any public place, looked round at those of his fellow-passengers who were similarly occupied. Nobody interested him until his glance fell on three men who sat together at a table in a corner, and who, over their soup, were evidently deep in a close and serious conversation. One of the three, an elderly, grey-bearded man, was obviously an Englishman, quiet, reserved, who said little, but listened attentively to the talk of his companions, of whom one was just as obviously a Frenchman, voluble, somewhat excited, while the other, by reason of his olive complexion and dark hair and eyes Perivale set down as an Italian. There was something about this group that suggested money; Perivale, after watching the three men attentively set them down as financiers of some sort, on their way to London.

These three men passed through the barrier at Folkestone a little in advance of Perivale, who, at the last moment, had paused to exchange another word or two with Luck, and he noticed that instead of boarding the train for London they walked on in the direction in which he himself was going—towards the exit of the harbour station. He guessed then at their immediate destination, and was not surprised to see them, each carrying a small suitcase, march direct to the Royal Pavilion Hotel into whose front door they presently vanished. Perivale stopped.

‘The syndicate!’ he suddenly said. ‘All the world to an orange, that’s the syndicate! Now, shall I follow those fellows—or go on to Mrs Volstroem’s?’

After a moment’s hesitation he passed the hotel, turned through the alley into High Street, and made his way to the modiste’s shop. That, of course, was closed, but there were lights in the windows above, and, finding a side door with a brass plate bearing the name Madame Volstroem, Perivale rang the bell. A smart-looking maid answered the summons without delay, and to Perivale’s question replied that Madame was at home. On that Perivale slipped his official card into a blank envelope.

‘Kindly give that to Madame, and tell he that if she will accord me an interview, I will not detain her very long,’ he said. ‘Tell her, too, that I beg ten thousand pardons for intruding upon her at this late hour. But my business is important.’

Two minutes later, Perivale found himself it a small room, half parlour, half office, on the walls of which there was but one ornament, an Icon, framed massively in silver, which hung over the mantelpiece. He was admiring this and speculating on its age when a light step behind him caused him to turn quickly. Mrs Volstroem stood there, his official card in her hand.

‘Yes?’ she said quietly. ‘You wish to speak to me?’

Perivale made his best bow. The woman was handsomer, more striking, more notable, than he had been prepared for, even after the encomiums of the head-waiter over there at Boulogne. But he saw at once that the head-waiter had been right—this was a woman who had suffered.

‘With your permission, madame,’ he answered. ‘I apologise for calling at this hour. But you see what my profession is.’ Mrs Volstroem nodded, glancing again at the card. She pointed her visitor to a chair and took one opposite him.

‘From the police,’ she said in the same quiet voice. ‘I was going to the police myself, tomorrow morning. Perhaps I should have gone before. It is, of course, about the murder of my friend, Monsieur Auberge. Yet—I can tell nothing!’

‘If I may suggest it, madame, you may not be quite sure of that,’ replied Perivale. ‘Every little helps! The slightest incident! But I may tell you why I called? By mere chance I ascertained tonight that on Monday evening you crossed from Boulogne in Monsieur Auberge’s company.’

'Yes—that is so,' said Mrs Volstroem. 'I met Monsieur Auberge in Paris last week. We are old friends—he once did me a great service. He told me that he should be at the Hotel Crystal at Boulogne on Sunday evening and on Monday, and as I had business at Abbeville on Monday morning I arranged to motor along to Boulogne and to lunch with him there. I did so; we spent the afternoon together, and in the evening travelled to Folkestone together.'

'And—then, madame, if I may inquire?' suggested Perivale.

'Monsieur Auberge was to stay at the Royal Pavilion Hotel, but he told me that he had an appointment in the town at nine-thirty. I waited outside while he booked his room at the hotel; then he joined me and we walked up to my door. He said goodbye to me then, after asking me to lunch with him next day at his hotel. And—that is all I know.'

'He did not tell you the name of the person with whom he had an appointment, madame?' asked Perivale. 'Nor tell you where it was to be kept?'

'Neither! He said no more than I have told you.'

'Would he be in time for that appointment?'

'He would be a little late—a few minutes, perhaps.'

Perivale thought for a while.

'Madame!' he said suddenly. 'I will be frank with you. I have been at the Hotel Crystal today. I heard of your being there with Monsieur Auberge. He showed you, in the salon after lunch, a very fine diamond?'

'Yes—a remarkable diamond!'

'Did he tell you anything about it?'

'Two things only. The first that it had been placed in his hands for disposal. The second that it had once been the property of a Russian noblewoman of high rank. That, he knew, would interest me, personally.' She paused, looking steadily at Perivale. 'I am Russian,' she added. 'A refugee!'

Perivale saw that she was perhaps unconsciously asking for sympathy; he bowed his head.

'I understand, madame!' he replied. 'But this diamond? Where did Monsieur Auberge put it after showing it to you?'

'In a small box, lined with wool, in his waistcoat pocket,' she announced.

'Did he mention it to you again?'

'No—we had more interesting things to talk of,' replied Mrs Volstroem. 'As I say, Monsieur Auberge had been a good friend to me in Paris—in oth-

er days. He helped me and mine when we escaped from Russia. He was a kindhearted man: I was grateful to him.'

Perivale rose.

'Rest assured, madame, that I shall leave no stone unturned to discover his murderer!' he said quietly. 'You can give me no help?'

Mrs Volstroem shook her head slowly.

'None,' she said. 'I know—nothing.'

Perivale went away. Once outside he stood for a moment staring at the nearest lamp.

'Who was it in this town with whom Auberge had an appointment?' he asked himself. 'There was nothing in his papers about it. Was the inspector right?—and shall I have to pick up the scent in Paris?'

But for the moment his business, as he knew, lay at the Royal Pavilion Hotel, and thither he hastened. On arriving there he went straight to the reception office; Miss Shepperson left her desk and came to him.

'I want to ask you a question,' said Perivale, whispering to her. 'When Auberge came here on Monday evening, did he ask if Mr Hartmore had arrived?'

'No!' replied Miss Shepperson. 'He didn't! He was in too much of a hurry to ask any questions. He never mentioned Mr Hartmore.'

'And Mr Hartmore didn't come in until—what time?'

'A quarter to eleven—just about that.'

'Very good! Now, you've had some gentlemen in tonight, from Paris, eh?'

'They're in, now, somewhere,' replied Miss Shepperson. 'You mean three gentlemen who came in together? Yes—after signing the register, they looked over the last page or two, and then asked me if Mr Hartmore was still here. I sent one of the waiters for him, and he and the three gentlemen went off together—I daresay they're in the smoking room.'

Perivale drew the register towards him. Miss Shepperson pointed to an entry.

'Those are the names,' she said. 'All from Paris.'

Perivale bent over the page at the place indicated, memorising the names.

Milford Spring Paris
Angelo Budini "
Leon Delardier "

‘Just as I thought!’ he muttered. ‘An Englishman, an Italian, and a Frenchman! That’s the syndicate Hartmore spoke of, sure enough. And a very pretty combination—in brains!’ He looked up at Miss Shepperson, who stood watching him with something of expectancy and interest in her eyes. ‘Well?’ he said, with a smile. ‘Have you anything to tell me—anything to help me with?’

‘I’m afraid not, Mr Perivale,’ she answered. ‘Of course, there’s been a lot of talk here, amongst the servants and so on, because they’ve learnt a good deal from the papers, but I haven’t heard of anything very pertinent. One of your men has been down here making inquiries about Mr Ecks—but I suppose you know all about that?’

‘No!’ replied Perivale. I’ve been away all day—across the water. Did you hear if he found out anything that I don’t know?’

‘Well, one thing. He came back later in the day and in asking some more questions he mentioned to the hall porter that he’d found a taxicab driver who drove Mr Ecks away from the corner of the hotel at seven o’clock yesterday morning.’

‘The deuce he had!’ exclaimed Perivale. ‘Good! I shall hear all about that in the morning, but you can relieve my anxiety, or gratify my curiosity. Where did this man take Ecks?’

‘To Dover,’ replied Miss Shepperson. ‘And there Mr Ecks was set down at the corner of Snargate. After which, of course, the taxi man saw him no more!’

Perivale’s face fell. Dover? So—probably—Ecks was back on the Continent—had no doubt been back on the Continent a good twenty-four hours!

‘And I suppose that’s been talked about—amongst your people?’ he remarked.

‘Your man made no secret of it—to our hall porter, anyway!’ replied Miss Shepperson.

Perivale turned away, abruptly. Theories were readily shaped in his mind. Supposing that Ecks, after seeing the diamond, had left his luggage at Boulogne, followed Auberge across, tracked him, murdered him, secured the diamond, slept, slipped over to Dover, taken a boat to Calais, trained or motored it from Calais to Boulogne—eh? In that case, he had secured a start that would…

But for the moment he shook off that idea, and walked into the smoking room. There, in a corner, he saw Hartmore, in company and in close debate with the three men of the boat.

7
The Syndicate

The four men were so engrossed in their conversation that Perivale's approach was unnoticed, and before Hartmore caught sight of him, the detective had time to observe the three who had first attracted his attention in the dining saloon of the *Biarritz*. The man he had set down as an Englishman sat back in his seat, a large cigar between his bearded lips, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, listening in a watchful silence; the supposed Italian, also smoking a cigar, was similarly silent and watchful. But the Frenchman, whose nationality there could be no mistaking, was talking twenty to the dozen, gesticulating freely with a cigarette, and turning first to one and then to another of his companions. And Perivale, as he drew near, became aware that this man, French though he obviously was, spoke remarkably good and clear English.

'That is the thing!' he was saying, excitedly. 'The one thing that matters—to us! Auberge?—he was but our agent! The thing is—where is our property—the diamond?'

Perivale went up and touched Hartmore's shoulder. Hartmore turned sharply, and rose, with a glance from the detective to the three men.

'Back already?' he said. 'Well—these are the gentlemen I told you about—members of the syndicate that employed Auberge.' He turned to the three. 'This is Mr Perivale, of the police—in charge of this case. Mr Perivale—Mr Spring, Mr Budini, Mr Delardier!'

The three men nodded quietly in response to Perivale's polite bow, and each spent a half-minute in giving him a steady, silent stare of inspection. Then Delardier made room for him in the corner in which they sat.

'Pleased to meet you, Mr Perivale,' he said in his good and ready English. 'Mr Hartmore has told us much about you already. We hope you have further news for us?'

'Little that is satisfactory, I'm afraid,' replied Perivale. He looked from one to the other in succession. 'Let me be clear about things,' he continued.

‘I understand that you are the three gentlemen who commissioned Auberge to negotiate the sale of a certain valuable diamond?’

‘We are!’ declared Delardier, with emphasis. ‘And we want to know what has become of our property!’

‘You are sure that Auberge had the diamond on him?’ asked Perivale.

‘Of a certainty the most absolute! It was handed to him by me, in the presence of my associates, Mr Spring, Mr Budini, the morning he left Paris—Sunday. Of course, he had it on him! To show to Mr Hartmore there.’

‘Can you say, gentlemen, if anybody, anyone whatsoever, knew that Auberge had that diamond on him—anyone outside yourselves?’

‘Nobody!’ said Delardier, more emphatically than ever. ‘Not a soul!’

Spring moved in his seat, and removed his cigar from his lips.

‘I don’t know if we can say that,’ he observed. ‘Auberge had known for a fortnight that he was to bring the diamond to England. He may have mentioned it to somebody—somebody in the trade in Paris.’

‘Yes,’ said Budini. ‘Delardier is too sure.’

Delardier smote the table in front of him.

‘No!’ he exclaimed. ‘No—always no! I knew Auberge, better than either of you. Auberge was a man of the strictest honour in business. He assured me that morning he left that-he had not mentioned the proposed transaction to anyone! I believe him. The only two people outside ourselves who knew of the existence of the diamond were Auberge and Hartmore there. And Hartmore declares that he, on his side, had never told anybody anything.’

‘Not a word,’ said Hartmore.

Perivale remained silent for a minute. He was debating in his own mind as to how much he should tell these men of what he had learnt that day. Eventually, he decided to hear more of what they could tell him.

‘You have heard all that Mr Hartmore could tell you, gentlemen,’ he said. ‘And as I perceive that one of you is an Englishman and that the other two speak English excellently, I take it that you have read the newspaper accounts of the murder of Monsieur Auberge? Now, what is your theory?’

Spring again removed his cigar and let out one word.

‘Followed!’

‘Yes,’ said Budini. ‘Followed.’

Delardier said nothing; he was watching Perivale.

‘If he was followed—to the place where he was murdered,’ said Perivale, ‘it argues that somebody knew he had the diamond on him, or believed he had. Yet you say that no one but yourselves and Hartmore knew of the transaction! So you will not object if I ask a very pertinent question. Who knew that this diamond—which, I understand, is of very great value, was in your hands, as a syndicate; was, in short, your property?’

The three men looked at each other; or, rather, Delardier and Budini looked at Spring. And once more Spring, glancing at the Frenchman, spoke in his usual laconic fashion.

‘Tell him!’

Delardier turned to the detective.

‘Only one person,’ he said.

‘And that was—you can tell me?’ suggested Perivale.

‘The person from whom we bought it!’ replied Delardier.

‘Not to be named, eh?’ asked Perivale.

‘Your surmise is correct. Not to be named! For that person assuredly has nothing to do with this affair—neither with the murder nor the robbery.’

‘Perhaps so, in your opinion,’ said Perivale. ‘But—can you speak on that point with certainty?’

Spring replied to that, in a longer sentence than was usual with him.

‘The person referred to is not in Europe,’ he said.

‘And has not been in Europe for some time,’ added Budini. ‘That person is beyond all suspicion—dismiss the matter!’

‘Then we come back to what I said,’ insisted Perivale. ‘If Auberge was followed by somebody who wanted to get the diamond, that somebody knew that Auberge had it! Yet you say that nobody but yourselves and Hartmore knew that he had it! And Hartmore assures us—’

‘I never mentioned the diamond to a soul until I mentioned it to you,’ interrupted Hartmore. ‘No occasion to!’

Delardier made an impatient movement.

‘That may be,’ he said. ‘But there was correspondence. Auberge wrote to Hartmore about the diamond. Hartmore has clerks in his office. Perhaps Hartmore is careless about his letters; perhaps—’

‘No clerk of mine ever saw Auberge’s letter,’ interrupted Hartmore. ‘I had only one letter from Auberge in which the diamond was actually mentioned, and it is in my pocket now, and has been there from the moment I finished reading it. It is impossible that anyone has ever seen it. As a matter

of fact, no clerk of mine has ever seen any correspondence of any sort between Auberge and myself.'

Once more Perivale was thinking. On the face of things, he was beginning to suspect Ecks, especially in view of the after-lunch episode in the Hotel Crystal at Boulogne. But for the present he kept on another track.

'Well, gentlemen,' he observed, 'this is all very puzzling. But, tell me, as you knew him so well—what do you know of the late Monsieur Auberge?—I mean of his private affairs?'

'Nothing!' replied Spring.

'We have no concern with his private affairs,' said Budini.

'Our relations with Auberge were only recent, and of a business nature,' remarked Delardier. 'Still, I know a little of Auberge. I have frequently encountered him at the Café de la Paix, where he was always to be found at a certain hour towards evening. And he was a great patron of the theatre—I have met him at various theatres.'

'Do you happen to know if he was a married man?' asked Perivale.

'I know that he was not! He was a single man—fond of life.'

'You evidently knew him much better than these other gentlemen, Monsieur Delardier,' remarked Perivale. 'It was you, I take it, who introduced him to your two friends?'

Delardier waved his cigarette towards the English member of the syndicate.

'On the contrary,' he said, 'it was Spring who introduced him to Budini and myself!'

'Business,' ejaculated Spring. 'Knew him as a likely man—reputable!'

'Well,' continued Perivale, 'it still remains that you, Monsieur Delardier, knew Auberge socially, in some degree. Now, do you know if he was mixed up in, or interested in, politics?'

'Politics!' exclaimed Delardier. 'Politics?' He paused, evidently struck by some reminiscence. 'Why do you ask?'

'Wait a moment!' said Perivale. He left the room and hastening to the office, obtained from Miss Shepperson the sealed packet. Taking this back to the four men, he withdrew the enclosed sheets and handed them to Delardier. 'When Auberge came here on Monday evening he deposited at the hotel office this packet. It contains nothing but these five closely-typed sheets, all in cypher. Can you throw any light on them?'

The three men bent towards the sheets of paper as Perivale passed them across. Each behaved differently in respect of this exhibit. Spring began to stroke his beard meditatively: Budini snatched up one sheet and fixed a close attention on it. But Delardier, after a glance, made as if to push the papers away from him.

'Bah!' he said. 'Cypher! Some affair of his own! What has all this to do with our property? The really important matter is the recovery of that—our diamond!'

Perivale was watching Budini; it seemed to him that the Italian betrayed some knowledge of the use of cypher; certainly he was showing deep interest in that before him. But for the moment he turned away from Budini to Delardier.

'Well, Monsieur Delardier,' he said, with studied politeness. 'Perhaps you will tell me what your theory is? I am open to any suggestion.'

'He was followed,' growled Delardier. 'Or, he was met. And murdered and robbed of the diamond. It is plain!'

'Well, you tell me that you handed him the diamond on the Sunday morning that he left Paris. Was that in the presence of your two friends here?'

'I have already said so—you forget!'

'Pardon! Very well—where did Auberge put it?'

'In a small box, lined with cotton wool, which he placed in the top right hand pocket of his waistcoat. The pocket was protected by a special catch—a button. He was in the habit of carrying such things there.'

'Very good! I can assure you that when I examined his dead body, not very long after it was found, there was nothing in that pocket! But now tell me—how did Auberge travel to Boulogne that Sunday?'

'By car—at our special request. We did not wish him to go by train. And we know all his movements till he reached Boulogne, for, before leaving for this place, I, this morning, interviewed the chauffeur who drove him—to the Hotel Crystal in that port.'

Perivale reflected in silence once more. He was not going to tell these men all he knew, but he would tell something.

'Well, gentlemen,' he said at last. 'I may safely give you some information. It has come to my knowledge that when Monsieur Auberge reached this town, at nine o'clock, on Monday evening, he had, in addition to his appointment with Mr Hartmore, another, with some person whose identity is quite unknown to me so far. I have positive proof that he left this hotel to

keep that other appointment! Whether he kept it, and if he kept it it was with the person who subsequently murdered him, I can't say, of course. But—we shall see!'

'How came you to know of that other appointment?' demanded Delardier. 'We should know!'

'At present I can't tell you any more,' said Perivale. He held out a hand for the cypher sheets. 'There may be some revelation of the secret in there,' he continued. 'I am thinking of submitting them to an expert.'

'It is a code!' exclaimed Budini, suddenly. 'Whoever it was intended for will have a key by which it can be decoded!'

'I will see to it,' said Perivale. 'We shall leave no stone unturned!'

Spring stretched his arms, yawning.

'I shall go to bed,' he said. 'No good talking any longer! Good night!'

He marched off. Hartmore and Budini followed. Perivale, too, was about to leave, when Delardier, still lounging in his seat and staring fixedly at him, held up a finger. Perivale looked round; the smoking room, save for themselves, was by that time deserted.

'Yes, monsieur?' he said in French. 'You have that to say—?'

'I have this to say, monsieur,' replied Delardier in low tones. 'Monsieur, do you suspect anybody?'

'At present, monsieur, with any degree of certainty, no one,' replied Perivale.

'Then, monsieur, I do! Monsieur; I suspect Hartmore!'

8
Hartmore?—Or Ecks?

Perivale sat down again, giving the Frenchman a look that was intended to inspire complete confidence.

'Yes, monsieur?' he said quietly. 'You suspect Hartmore?'

Delardier spread his hands abroad with a gesture that seemed to indicate something very like cynical contempt.

'Who else, monsieur?' he replied. 'Put it to yourself, this matter. Who, outside ourselves—I and my colleagues—and Auberge, knew of the existence of this diamond, or, at any rate, where it was, but Hartmore?'

'Supposing we grant that?' said Perivale. He had no mind, at present, to take Delardier into his confidence about the episode of the Hotel Crystal. 'Let us agree that Hartmore was the only person, other than yourselves and Auberge, who knew. What do you argue, monsieur?'

'This! Auberge, according to you—I do not know how you got your information on that point, but I conclude that it is accurate—Auberge, you say, had an appointment with some person in this town, to be kept after his arrival from Boulogne. That appointment was not at this hotel. He comes to this hotel; he books his room; he goes up to it; he comes down again; he goes out—not a word to anybody as to whether Mr Hartmore has arrived—no! Who is it he is going to meet?—somewhere here in Folkestone? Monsieur!—the answer is obvious! He is going to meet Hartmore.'

'Why should he meet Hartmore in the town, when, by letter, they had already arranged to meet at this hotel?' asked Perivale.

Again Delardier spread out his hands.

'How should I know that?' he exclaimed, almost testily. 'It is all—how do you call it?—all of a piece! Hartmore only can say! Probably—at his suggestion. I have made some inquiries myself, monsieur, since my arrival tonight. Hartmore did not come into this hotel until nearly eleven o'clock—between a quarter to eleven and the hour. Where was he until then? You see, I am familiar with this route—I travel a good deal between Paris and

London, generally by Folkestone and Boulogne. There is no train, monsieur, which would bring Hartmore from Victoria to this town just before eleven o'clock. He had been here some time—for what purpose but to meet Auberge in the town? No doubt Auberge had an appointment with some person when he hurried out of this hotel just after nine o'clock on Monday evening—yes, that person was Hartmore!'

Perivale was thinking of what Mrs Volstroem had told him. There was no doubt that Auberge had an appointment with somebody in the town: it was possible that it might have been with Hartmore. And he began to wonder if Hartmore's original intention had been to come to the Royal Pavilion, or if he had only come there at eleven o'clock after—but he scarcely liked, at that juncture, to make a further supposition. Delardier, however, was not so diffident. He suddenly broke in on the detective's silence by bending across the table and speaking in a low, concentrated whisper.

'Monsieur, I tell you plainly what I think,' he said. 'I think Auberge met Hartmore in the town. I think Hartmore lured Auberge to that place where Auberge was next morning found murdered, and there he ran him through the heart. Then he took the diamond and came to this hotel and asked for Auberge—and that, monsieur, was what you English call bluff—a piece of consummate bluff, monsieur!—all done to direct suspicion from himself!'

'It is a serious charge!' said Perivale.

'It is a serious crime!' exclaimed Delardier. 'But—unfortunately—it is not yet a charge; it is a suspicion. Still—it is my belief! I advise you, monsieur, to find out more about this man. Investigate him.'

With this final admonition Delardier rose, and bidding the detective an abrupt good night, retired. Perivale sat for a while ruminating on what he had heard. That there might be some thing in Delardier's theory he recognised clearly. There were elements of suspicion about Hartmore's relation to the case which could not be neglected. It was a significant fact that when Auberge arrived at the Royal Pavilion Hotel, he did not ask if Hartmore had arrived there. Did that not seem to argue that he was to meet Hartmore at some other place in Folkestone? Hartmore had declared that they were to meet at the Royal Pavilion, but that might not be true—it might be that Hartmore, as Delardier had suggested, had only come to the Royal Pavilion as an afterthought. Certainly he must make more inquiry about Hartmore. And then, there was Ecks! Why did Ecks, who certainly came across from Boulogne on the same boat which brought Auberge and Mrs Volstroem, not

present himself at the hotel until more than two hours after the arrival of the boat. Where was he between nine o'clock and eleven o'clock? Why did Ecks, whoever he was, make tracks for Dover so early in the morning of Tuesday? There were highly suspicious facts attaching to Ecks. Ecks had seen Auberge exhibit the diamond to Mrs Volstroem at the Hotel Crystal, across there at Boulogne. Ecks had been given a room at the Royal Pavilion, close to that assigned to Auberge, and as Auberge had left his key in his door, Ecks could easily obtain access to Auberge's apartment. Oh yes—but Ecks had made good his escape. In Perivale's opinion, Ecks had been back in France, by way of Dover and Calais, early on Tuesday afternoon—he had had a fine start, if indeed he was the real culprit. And by that time he might be Lord knows where—Amsterdam, Berlin, Vienna, or, more likely, safe hidden in some obscure retreat in Paris.

Hartmore, however, was there, and Perivale realised that he had got to know more about him. And after a little more thinking, he took a room at the hotel, and went to bed, and was up early next morning, and downstairs by eight o'clock. Early as it was, he saw Miss Addie Shepperson in the office, and made up to her.

'I stayed here last night,' he said, seeing her look of surprise at his presence. 'You'd disappeared when I got a room. I stayed for two or three reasons—one was that I wanted to ask you a question or two early this morning. Just let your mind go back to Monday evening!'

Miss Shepperson gave him an illuminating glance.

'It hasn't had much chance of being anywhere else, since Tuesday morning, Mr Perivale,' she replied, dryly. 'Has yours?'

'Well—then you can answer,' said Perivale. 'Now, be sure! Are you dead certain that when Auberge came here on Monday evening he didn't ask for Hartmore?'

'He never mentioned Hartmore. Never asked if Hartmore was here, or was expected, or anything.'

'But when Hartmore arrived, he asked for Auberge?'

'At once. Showed great surprise, too, to hear that Auberge was out!'

'Very well! Now then—what luggage had Hartmore when he got here?'

'Nothing but a very small suit-case. You could scarcely call it that—an attaché case.'

'Which, of course, is in his room now. Now look here!—I may want you to give me the opportunity of taking a look at that room. You understand!

Can it be done?'

'Done easily enough, if he's out,' said Miss Shepperson.

'I'll see about that,' replied Perivale. 'Very well—all this is between you and me. You understand? '

'Oh, I understand,' answered Miss Shepperson. 'I was not born yesterday, Mr Perivale!'

'Not long before, though, I think,' responded Perivale, gallantly. 'You look very juvenile this morning!'

'Do I?' said Miss Shepperson.

'And more charming than ever—which is saying a lot,' added Perivale.

'Thank you,' replied Miss Shepperson. 'Hadn't you better go and have your breakfast?'

Perivale laughed, and went. There were not many people in the coffee room, but one of them was Hartmore. Perivale joined him, with a word of reason for his presence.

'Seen our French friends—or, I should say, our friends from Paris—this morning?' he asked.

'I haven't,' replied. Hartmore. 'I don't know that I want to. I've told them all I know, and I don't see that I can do more. I'm off to town by the eleven o'clock.'

He spoke with the air of a man who has had enough of a subject, and for the moment Perivale said nothing. But after ordering his breakfast, he turned to his companion.

'I'm afraid you can't do that, Mr Hartmore,' he said. 'I told you, you'll remember, that you'd have to stop here a bit!'

Hartmore looked up from his plate, distinct dislike of the detective's last remark in his expression.

'Why must I stop here?' he asked. 'I've been here longer than I'd intended.'

'You've forgotten, Mr Hartmore,' replied Perivale. 'There's the little matter of the inquest on Auberge. That's fixed for eleven o'clock this morning. Your evidence will be necessary—you can identify Auberge.'

Hartmore showed his impatience.

'Very annoying,' he muttered. 'I particularly want to get back to my business. As to identifying Auberge, these men from Paris can do that. They knew him much more intimately than I did.'

‘Maybe,’ assented Perivale. ‘All the same, you’ll be wanted there. The coroner will want to hear your account of things. I don’t know if he’ll get as far as that today, but of course he will want, eventually, to know all you can tell.’

‘Where’s the Coroner’s Court?’ demanded Hartmore.

Perivale gave him the information he asked for, and presently Hartmore went off, grumbling.

And Perivale, making haste to finish his breakfast went off, too, on his own business, which was first to set a man to shadow Hartmore wherever he went, and second to make a pilgrimage to the railway station, where, after some inquiry, he hit upon the ticket collector who had been on duty on Monday evening. This man was not on duty that morning, however, nor until late in the afternoon, and Perivale went to work with him.

‘I want you,’ he said, after some preliminary explanation, ‘to be in the Coroner’s Court—you know where it is—before eleven o’clock this morning, when the inquest on that Frenchman, Auberge, who was murdered on Monday night, near the Leas, is to be opened. You’ll see me there, and I shall have sitting next to me a man’—here he gave the ticket collector a brief description of Hartmore—‘at whom I want you to take a very careful look. I want you to try to recollect if you saw him arrive at the Central Station on Monday evening, and if so, by what train? The time is most important—don’t make any mistake about it. Look at him well, and see what you can recollect. I’ll see you when the inquest is over—or, rather, adjourned. I don’t think there’ll be more than merely formal proceedings this morning.’

The ticket collector, interested at being called upon to figure in such an intriguing mystery, promised to do his best and recollect his hardest, and at eleven o’clock, Perivale, seated in the Coroner’s Court, with Hartmore’ at his side, saw him staring hard at the London diamond merchant. The next moment, catching the detective’s eye, he first nodded, then winked, and made a slight motion of his head towards the door—Perivale took it to mean that he had something to tell, once they got outside. And when the proceedings, which, as Perivale had expected, were purely formal, and merely for purposes of identification, were over, and the Coroner had adjourned the inquest for ten days, he made haste to meet his man.

‘Well?’ he asked, when they had gone aside to a quiet place… ’You saw the man I indicated to you?’

‘I did, Mr Perivale,’ assented the ticket collector. ‘And I remembered him well enough, sir. He arrived at the Central at 6.30, Monday evening. That’s the 5 o’clock from Charing Cross.’

‘You’re certain of what you say?’

‘Dead certain, sir. There weren’t many passengers got off. Perhaps a dozen, all told. This gentleman came out of a first-class smoking compartment, right opposite me, where I stood at the gate. I noticed him for a very particular reason, Mr Perivale. When I’m not pressed for time, I’m a noticing sort—it’s a habit I’ve got into.’

‘What was the particular reason?’

‘Why, I noticed that he carried a very fine walking stick, what anybody would call a real handsome stick! It was some sort of a cane, what sort I didn’t know at first, with silver mountings about the handle. I took stock of it, and when he came up to me to deliver his ticket, he had to search his pockets,: and he leaned the cane against the barrier, so I saw it closer. And I saw, then, what it was.’

‘What?’ asked Perivale.

‘One of those sword sticks,’ answered the ticket collector. ‘A sort of first-rate article, too. I know a bit about that sort of thing—I’ve a brother-in-law in Dover who keeps a stick and umbrella shop.’

‘Had he any luggage, this man, when he arrived?’ asked Perivale.

‘Only a small case, sir, which he carried himself.’

‘Do you know where he went? Did he drive off, or go on foot?’

‘As far as I know, on foot, sir. But I paid no further attention to him after he’d passed me.’

‘And you’re absolutely certain that that’s the man, and that he reached Folkestone at six thirty? ‘

‘As dead certain, Mr Perivale, as that I see you! No doubt at all, sir!’

Perivale went off, asking himself one more question.

Where was Hartmore between half-past six and eleven o’clock on the evening of Monday, October 23rd?

9
The Sword Stick

The more Perivale considered that question the more suspicious he became in regard to Hartmore. He had seen that Delardier was a shrewd man; possibly, Delardier had hit the right nail on the head in fixing on Hartmore as the guilty person. And leaving the Coroner's Court he turned in the direction of the Royal Pavilion Hotel, bent on making an inspection of Hartmore's room. On his way he caught sight of Hartmore. Hartmore was looking into the window of a jeweller's shop; near him, but on the opposite side of the street, was the man, a fellow-detective of Perivale, who had been entrusted with the task of keeping an eye on him. And Perivale, presently seeing Hartmore walk into the shop, and knowing he was safe for a time, sped on to the hotel, and within a few minutes, through the agency of Miss Shepperson, was in Hartmore's room.

There was not much to see in that room. Indeed, there was nothing, outside the usual furnishings, beyond a small brown leather attaché case which stood on a corner of the dressing table. For the moment Perivale paid no attention to that: what he was looking for was the noticeably handsome stick or cane of which the ticket collector had spoken. But the stick was not there. It was not in any corner, nor in the wardrobe, nor on the mantelpiece—nor was it hidden under the mattress of the bed. Clearly Hartmore had not brought his stick to the hotel, or, at any rate, to his room.

Perivale turned to the attaché case. It was locked, but to open it was child's play to him. A bit of twisted steel which he produced from his waistcoat pocket did that trick in a second. And, as he had expected, there was nothing worth his time or trouble. A suit of pyjamas; some socks, collars, handkerchiefs; toile articles—that was all. Not a paper of any description. He made the case secure again with his bit of steel, and went downstairs, to find Miss Shepperson.

'More demands on your memory,' he said, leaning over the desk to her. 'Go back to Monday night again. Had Hartmore anything beyond that small

case with him when le booked his room? Be sure!'

'Nothing,' replied Miss Shepperson. 'Absolutely nothing.'

'No umbrella?'

'No.'

'Now, are you sure he hadn't a stick—a walking stick?'

'I'm absolutely certain, Mr Perivale, that he'd nothing but what I say. He'd just that case. He laid it down there—precisely there, where my finger is! while he signed the register. He'd no stick.'

'Good girl!' murmured Perivale, approvingly. 'You're a treasure! I love precision and accuracy in a woman. Your positiveness is so refreshing to me that, that—'

'Well, what?' demanded Miss Shepperson, archly.

'That I should like to see more of you,' declared Perivale, boldly. 'Just that.'

'You can see me, Mr Perivale, at any time you like between nine o'clock in the morning and two in the afternoon, and again between six and some uncertain hour in the evening,' retorted Miss Shepperson. 'And all for nothing, too! You've only got to come to this desk and you'll see me, behind it.'

'I should prefer to see you—elsewhere,' said Perivale, meaningly. 'There must be times when you have what is vulgarly called a day off? Eh?'

'Well—there are,' admitted Miss Shepperson. 'One can't always be working, can one?'

'When is the next occasion?' asked Perivale, disregarding the last observation. 'The very next?'

Miss Shepperson gave him a shy glance.

'Oh, well,' she replied demurely. 'If you really must know, Sunday after next.'

'Consider me your slave for that day,' exclaimed Perivale, eagerly. 'Meet me outside here at eleven o'clock in the morning, and I'll take you for the most delightful joyride you ever had in your life, and look after you like a grandfather. Is it a bargain?'

'I don't think I'd like to be treated like a granddaughter,' said Miss Shepperson, smiling still more demurely. 'But I'll come. Thank you.'

'Don't,' expostulated Perivale. 'The gratitude is mine. I'm a lonely man—and I'm cursed with a sentimental temperament. Sometimes, when I read love stories at night, to take my mind off my work, I shed tears! Fact!'

‘You’re a queer mixture,’ said Miss Shepperson. ‘Sentimental one side of you—and I should say ruthless the other. By the by, that French gentleman was asking for you just now—Monsieur Delardier. He’s in the smoking room.’

Perivale went off without another word. He found Delardier in the same corner in which they had conversed the night before. Spring and Budini were with him. Before them lay a newspaper at which all three were gazing. As the detective approached, Delardier lifted a somewhat vexed countenance.

‘There is something here that we do not like,’ he exclaimed, when Perivale went up. ‘It must, we suppose, have come from you, or from your associates of the police. There are things there, particulars, which we did not wish divulged. We should have been consulted.’

He handed Perivale the newspaper as he spoke, and the detective, glancing at the indicated part, saw a column headed in big type—

> MYSTERY OF A DIAMOND.
> STRANGE REVELATIONS ABOUT THE FOLKESTONE MURDER
> THE DIAMOND? WHERE IS IT?

Very much to his amazement, Perivale found that in the paragraphs heralded by this there was a full account of the story of the missing stone—of its having been entrusted by a syndicate in Paris to Monsieur Auberge for disposal, of Auberge’s bringing it to Folkestone to show to Mr Marcus Hartmore (referred to as ‘a gentleman of the highest reputation and probity’) and of its mysterious disappearance after or through the murder of the Parisian diamond merchant. Obviously, the article was inspired. But—by whom?

‘None of my work, Monsieur!’ said Perivale, handing back the paper. ‘Nor, I’ll swear, of any of my associates! That has not been got from the police. We’ve taken particular pains to keep all mention of the diamond secret so far. It could have been mentioned at the opening of the inquest this morning—you were all there, gentlemen, and you know it was never referred to.’

‘Who has given this information to the press, then?’ demanded Delardier.

‘Can’t say!’ replied Perivale. ‘Haven’t the ghost of a notion! Somebody who knows a good deal, anyhow!’

‘It is not what we wish—’ began Delardier.

‘But it would have had to come out,’ broke in Perivale. ‘You couldn’t keep such a material fact back, long. It would all have come out at the adjourned inquest. What’s the present theory? What’s your own theory? That Auberge was murdered for the diamond, of course!’

‘We do not mind it being known that Auberge was murdered for *a* diamond!’ grumbled Delardier. ‘We do not like it to be noised abroad that it was for *our* diamond! I think some of your people have been got at by the newspaper reporters. Your police are not immaculate!’

Perivale made no reply to that. Presently he left the hotel, and, after thinking a little, bent his steps to the office of the local newspaper which Delardier had placed in his hands. He knew the editor-reporter there, and at once plumped him with a direct question.

‘Who wrote that stuff about the missing diamond in your issue of this morning?’ he asked. ‘You?’

‘I did! What’s the matter with it? Isn’t it correct?’

‘Correct enough—so far as I know! But who gave you the information?’

‘That man staying at the Royal Pavilion—Mr Hartmore. Diamond merchant himself, so he told me.’

‘Did you go to him?’ inquired Perivale.

‘Go to him. No! He came here, yesterday. Said he’d give me some good copy. He told me all there is in the article. It is good copy! Why wasn’t something mentioned at the opening of the inquest this morning?’

‘Police reasons. Look here! I know you supply stuff to the London press agencies. Have you sent this off there, as well as used it yourself? ‘

‘Sure! It’ll be in the London evening papers tonight, and the morning dailies tomorrow. Why not?’

Perivale gave no answer to that question. He was wondering what object Hartmore had in disseminating this news about the diamond; he had even told the writer of the article what it was supposed to be worth. That Hartmore had had some purpose in this it was impossible to doubt—but what purpose? Perivale put that question to the inspector when he got back to the police station. But the inspector shook his head.

‘Hartmore’s whole conduct—as you’ve set it out to me—is a puzzle!’ he said. ‘I’m beginning to feel a bit suspicious about him. Yet—he seems a perfectly respectable sort of man, eh?’

‘Quite!’ agreed Perivale. ‘Bit furtive, though. Sort of man who gives you the impression of having something up his sleeve.’

‘Well, it’s certainly advisable to keep an eye on him,’ said the inspector. ‘Now, these three men from Paris—the syndicate. What about them?’

‘The leading figure is a sharp, suspicious Frenchman,’ replied Perivale. ‘Another is a stodgy Englishman, who says nothing. The third is an astute Italian—characteristically so! He holds his tongue and keeps his ears at their widest!’

‘You think that diamond is really their property?’

‘I’ve no reason to suppose it isn’t! If it isn’t we’ll soon know. That stuff in this morning’s local paper will be in all the London papers within twenty-four hours, and in all the Paris papers in forty-eight. Oh, I think the diamond’s theirs! They probably bought it cheap from one of these Russian refugees of high standing, as they say.’

The inspector turned over a page or two of memoranda, and reflected.

‘Something should be done about the man who calls himself Mr Ecks,’ he said. ‘That’s all very suspicious, Perivale! You think he made off to the Continent again?’

‘Why should he hasten to Dover?’ asked Perivale.

‘Don’t think that’s conclusive,’ said the inspector. ‘He could get from Dover to London! He may have slipped over to Dover so as to avoid being seen in Folkestone that morning.’

‘Yes,’ agreed Perivale. ‘But—when Ecks was at the Hotel Crystal at Boulogne he had two very good suit-cases with him. Well, he didn’t bring those suit-cases to the Royal Pavilion Hotel! He brought nothing in the way of luggage.’

‘Well?’

‘Well—I think he left his suit-cases at the Maritime Station at Boulogne! I think that—’

At that moment a policeman put his head into the room.

‘Man outside would like a word with you, sir,’ he said, addressing the inspector. ‘Name of Rosenbaum. This murder business, he said—just a word.’

‘Bring him straight in!’ said the inspector. ‘Rosenbaum—sounds like one of the chosen people, Perivale. Well, sir?’ he continued, as a young Jew sidled into the room and closed the door behind him with particular care. ‘What can I do for you?’

The visitor, having taken stock of his company, dropped on the edge of a chair and became confidential.

‘Mithter!’ he said, eyeing the inspector. ‘My name’th Ithidore Rothenbaum, and I may ath well tell you that I wath one’th a clerk to Mithter Marcuth Hartmore, and that I’ve got my knife into him, ‘cauthe he done the dirty on me—proper! All the thame, mithter, what I’m going to tell you ith truth—tholid truth! You thee, I’ve read all there ith in the paperth about thith here murder of the Frenchie, and having a bit of bithneth mythelf thith way, I thought I’d drop in and enlighten you! Now, mithter, ith it a fact that the Frenchman wath done in by a thtab from behind?—run through the heart, mithter?’

‘The doctors agree that it was so, Mr Rosenbaum,’ replied the inspector.

Mr Rosenbaum turned and regarded Perivale—intently for a few seconds.

‘Ith thith gentleman a ‘tec?’ he inquired, frankly. ‘For if he ain’t, he’d ought to be! Heith, ith he? Good bithneth! Well, gent’th, of courth I’ve read that Hartmore ith mixed up in thith affair, And I’d have you know that Hartmore pothetheth and commonly carrieth an uncommonly fine thord-thick! It’th beauty—the thord’s a rapier of the finetht quality. I theen it many a time! Gent’th, it theemth a funny thing that thith thould happen when Hartmore ith about, conthidering hith pothethion of that thord-thick, don’t it? Of courth, there ith thuch a thing ath cointhidenth, but if I wath a polithe offither—’

Ten minutes later, when Mr Isidore Rosenbaum had discharged his duty to the public and departed, the inspector turned to Perivale. His air was definite.

‘There’s only one thing to be done, Perivale!’ he said. ‘You’ll have to bring Hartmore here and he’ll have to give us some explanation! What we want to know is—where was he and what was he doing between half-past six and eleven o’clock on the night of the murder? So—see after him!’

‘Yes!’ agreed Perivale. ‘There’s nothing else for it. This afternoon then.’

He had an idea that Hartmore would probably try to leave Folkestone that afternoon, the inquest having been adjourned for ten days, so he went straight to the hotel where, in the coffee room, he saw Hartmore at lunch. And this time he did not join him; he had no mind to force himself upon a man whom, as far as he could then see, it was very probable he would be obliged to arrest. But when Hartmore rose and left the room, Perivale followed.

10
Peeping Peter

Hartmore, when he left the coffee room, turned in the direction of the office, and Perivale, suspecting that he was going to ask for his bill, preparatory to leaving the hotel, took up a position in the hall, from whence he could watch him. As he stood there, affecting to read a playbill which had just been placed in a frame of announcements, a plainclothes policeman entered, and, catching sight of him, came to his side.

'The inspector wants you,' he whispered. 'Wants you to go up at once—something highly important. And he said'—here he lowered his voice still more—'he said—if Hartmore is still here you're to tell Hargreaves to keep a stricter watch than ever on him—the inspector's got something fresh, I think.'

'All right—coming,' replied Perivale. 'You go.' He looked out of the hall door and saw when he left the coffee—the man who had been commissioned to shadow Hartmore hanging about the road in front of the hotel. 'Stop, though,' he added. 'There's Hargreaves out there. I don't want to be seen speaking to him. You go to him. Tell him, from me, that you're to help him. The two of you are to watch Hartmore if he leaves this hotel, as he probably will, before long. Follow him wherever he goes. If he goes to the station, or takes a taxicab, you're to stop him and tell him he's wanted at the police headquarters. And mind this—if he makes any objection, you're to tell him plainly he's got to go there. Understand?'

'Perfectly,' said the plainclothes man, 'I'll see to it.'

He went off towards the man outside; presently Perivale saw them in conversation across the road. And at that, paying no further attention to Hartmore, he hastened to the police station and into the inspector's presence.

The inspector was not alone. With him, perched on a chair in the corner of the room, was a man who was known to Perivale well enough as one of the curiosities of the town—a queer, eccentric, nondescript character, who,

from his strange habits had earned the sobriquet of Peeping Peter. His general appearance was that of a man who makes his bed anywhere, and eschews soap and water as long as possible; his clothes were rags, and his hair and beard long foreign to comb or scissors. Yet, derelict though he looked, there was a certain sharpness in his unwashed face, and a distinctive brightness in his shrewd eyes which betokened a more than average intelligence, and Perivale, who knew his reputation, was not surprised to see him there—Peeping Peter, he realised at once, had brought information in company with his rags and with the scent feu tum, which hung about his disreputable e.

Perivale's rapid glance passed from Peeping Peter to something that lay across the inspector's desk. That something was a long, thin parcel, done up loosely in brown paper and a bit of old sacking. And as Perivale advanced into the room the inspector placed his hand on this parcel, with a significant nod:

'Here's a discovery, Perivale!' he said. 'Any idea what there is in here?'

'Um not guessing,' replied Perivale.

'Well, I don't think you'd have to guess long,' remarked the inspector. 'It's that sword stick we've heard of this morning. Here it is.'

He drew from the folds of paper and sacking a handsome Malacca cane, silver mounted, and of evident value, and from it a rapier which Perivale instinctively felt to be of the finest steel and of exquisite workmanship. The two men stood side by side staring at it for a moment; then Perivale nodded at Peeping Peter, who from his corner regarded them in stolid, but watchful silence.

'He bring it?' he asked.

'Precisely,' replied the inspector. He balanced the rapier in his hands for a moment; then replaced it in its sheath, and nodded at Peeping Peter. 'Tell Detective-sergeant Perivale what you told me, Macdonald,' he said.

The unkempt figure straightened itself, the bright eyes, peering out through a mass of grizzled hair, grew brighter; Peeping Peter revealed himself as something active.

'Ye'll understand that I always had a bit of a taste for the sort o' work that ye're engaged on yerself, Mr Perivale?' he said. 'And I'll no' deny that I was at one time in something of the same line of business, and I would ha' done well at it, if it hadna' been that I was ower fond o' the rum. And it's well known here in this town, where I ha' lived many years after being cast

up here like a bit o' wreckage, that I'm o' those habits and procleevities, and canna help sticking my nose into this or that—ye can see me any morning searching the shore, for ye never know what may be cast up, and I've had finds in my time. But this, ye'll say, is neither here nor there, and I'll get on to my subject. Well, ye'll understand that a man like me would naturally take a deep interest in the murder o' this Frenchman the other night, and there'd be no part o' the proceedings, as you might term them, more interesting than that relating to how the deed was accomplished. Well, now, the medicos were at one on that point—that the unfortunate gentleman was killed by a thrust through the heart from a lethal weapon, which might be a rapier, or a stiletto, or a long, sharply-pointed knife. And they being unanimous on that point, it seemed to me that I would be belying the soobrikay which the townsfolk have fastened on me if I did not employ my talents in finding that weapon.'

He paused at that, and, producing, from some recess of his tattered garments, an old-fashioned snuffbox, helped himself liberally to its contents, and, thus refreshed, continued his story in leisurely fashion.

'And ye'll understand, Detective-sergeant Perivale—for I'm thinking ye're a young fellow that's not without imagination—that my first argument was a sound one—I argued to myself that the first action of the murderer, having slain his victim, would be to rid himself of the Weapon with which he'd slain him. Now the exact place where this murder took place is an ideal spot for concealing anything! Ye'll no' be so well acquaint, either of you, with that bit o' the Leas as I am, for there's nobody in this town knows that part as intimately as I do, through long peering in it. But ye'll know that where that French body was done to his death there are rocks, and in those rocks there are holes and crevices and cracks. What more natural than that the murderer should drop his weapon into some crack, or crevice, or hole—never wanting to see it again, and pretty sure that it would never be found?'

Again he produced the old snuffbox and again refreshed himself. A sly smile came over his face—or what could be seen of it—as he resumed.

'A-weel, I'm no' going to trouble you with a full and verbatim account o' my researches into the inner recesses o' those rocks. Suffice it to say that after several days of patient and intelligent observation, I, this morning, discovered the weapon which lies before ye. Gentlemen, I ha' no doubt whatsoever that ye see the blade which spilt the Frenchman's blood.'

He concluded with.a dramatic flourish of his hands; it was plain that he was exceedingly vain of his achievement. But Perivale's voice, heard next, was matter-of-fact enough.

'Where—exactly—was it?'

'Shoved in a crack in the rock, right opposite the place where the man was found,' replied Macdonald. 'The crack had been closed up by forcing soil and pebbles into the opening.'

'You can point, out the exact place?'

'As often as ye'll be wanting to see it. It'll no' run away.'

'Did anyone see you take the stick out of this hole?'

'Nobody. I took good care of that!'

'But there has always been a crowd of people about there,' said Perivale. 'Ever since the murder people have flocked there. How did you manage—'

'To carry on my work? Why, I would ha' given ye credit for more reflection, man! When nobody was there, to be sure. Nights! I tell't ye I found that fearsome thing this morning. But I didna' say what hour o' the morning. It was just three o'clock.'

'Why didn't you bring it here sooner, then?' demanded Perivale.

'Because it didna' suit my convenience,' replied Peeping Peter. 'I went to my bed.'

The inspector nudged Perivale's elbow and drew him aside.

'I suppose there's no doubt that this is the stick, or cane, the ticket collector spoke of, and that the little Jew chap told us about?' he said. 'Hartmore must have hidden it. And that's about as suspicious—but where is Hartmore?'

'He's all right,' replied Perivale. 'Hargreaves and Foster are attending to him. We must have him here. What about this old chap?'

The inspector turned to Peeping Peter.

'Well, Macdonald,' he said, 'you'll keep all this to yourself for the present, of course! Now you'll want some reward—what about a couple of pounds?'

'Man, I wouldna' know what to do wi' so much money,' replied the informant. 'Gi' me a matter o' five shillings, and I'll come again when I want more. And ye may depend on me for the strictest secrecy—till I'm wanted. Secrets? I ha' more secrets locked up in my head than ye wot of!'

Perivale remained talking to the inspector for some little time after the queer old man had departed; at last, remarking that he would see what

Hartmore was doing, he went out. But at the door of the police station he came to an abrupt halt. For there was Hartmore, flustered and indignant, getting out of a taxicab, in company with the two plainclothes men.

Hartmore caught sight of Perivale as he stepped from the cab, and immediately made for him. But Perivale turned sharply on his heel and hastened back to the inspector's room.

'Put that sword stick out of sight, quick,' he exclaimed. 'There's Hargreaves and Foster here and they've brought Hartmore with them. What line are you going to take with him?'

'Explanation as to his movements on Monday night,' replied the inspector. 'We'll see what comes of that. If—'

The two plainclothes men appeared at the door ushering in their captive. One of them carried Hartmore's attaché case, the other introduced its owner as formally as if he had been making a business introduction.

'Mr Hartmore to speak with you, sir,' he announced.

'Come in, Mr Hartmore; take a seat,' said the inspector. 'I was waiting to see you—'

Hartmore looked angrily from the inspector to Perivale.

'I want to know why I am brought here!' he exclaimed. 'What right had these men of yours—'

'I wouldn't take that tone if I were you, Mr Hartmore,' interrupted the inspector. 'A little conversation with me will do you no harm. All right,' he continued, nodding at the plainclothes men. 'You can go.'

Perivale followed Hargreaves and Foster into the corridor.

'What happened after I left the hotel?' he asked. 'What did he do?'

'Came out a few minutes after you,' replied Hargreaves, 'carrying his little case. He walked to the corner and got a taxicab. We got another and followed. He drove up to the General Post Office. He was in there some minutes, nearly ten; then he came out and went off again—this time to the station. So we stopped him there, on the platform, before he'd got his ticket, and told him the inspector wanted him for a talk. He refused to go—we had to tell him he'd got to go. And—in the end he came. But he didn't like it, and he blustered a lot.'

Hartmore was showing signs of liking it still less when Perivale reentered the inspector's room. He was listening with frowning brow and surly looks to the inspector's purposely suave and persuading accents.

‘I can’t see that it can do you any harm, Mr Hartmore, supposing you are, as you assert, an absolutely innocent factor in this affair—and please bear in mind that I never asked you whether you were innocent—you volunteered that bit of information yourself—-it can’t do you any harm, I say, to tell me what I’d like to know, and that is, full particulars of your movements on Monday evening last? Why not?’

Hartmore glared at Perivale.

‘He knows my movements,’ he said, irascibly. ‘He’s had plenty of information out of me! He knows that I arrived at the Royal Pavilion Hotel at eleven o’clock, expecting to meet Auberge, who was to be there at nine. Auberge had come and had gone out, and after waiting up a while for him, I went to bed.’

‘If your appointment was at nine, why weren’t you there at nine?’ inquired the inspector.

‘I didn’t say the appointment was at nine. I said Auberge was to be there at nine,’ retorted Hartmore. ‘The boat gets in from Boulogne a little before nine. The appointment was for that evening—no time specified.’

‘Where had you been until eleven o’clock?’ asked the inspector.

‘Coming from London,’ replied Hartmore promptly.

The inspector and Perivale exchanged glances. Then the inspector spoke more peremptorily.

‘Mr Hartmore,’ he said, ‘I’d better be perfectly plain with you. You arrived from London at the Central Station here at half-past six on Monday evening. Now, I want to know where you were and what you were doing between that hour and eleven o’clock, when you presented yourself at the Royal Pavilion Hotel?’

Perivale, watching Hartmore closely, saw that this took him aback. But he replied readily and with a certain boldness.

‘My business!’ he answered.

‘You won’t tell?’

‘I see no reason why I should account for my movements! For all you know, I may have a dozen friends in Folkestone.’

‘Very good—I hope they will come forward. But since you won’t tell me that, perhaps you’ll tell me this. When you arrived at the station here you were carrying a very handsome walking cane—a noticeable one. It’s no use denying that, for we know. Where is it, Mr Hartmore?’

‘That, too, is my business!’ retorted Hartmore, defiantly. ‘Entirely mine!’

The inspector reached for the parcel and drew out the sword stick. ‘Mine, too,’ he said quietly. ‘This is it, I think! Your name’s on it!’

11
The Registered Packet

At sight of the sword stick Hartmore suddenly rose from his chair. He was obviously startled, and, for the first time, Perivale saw a gleam of fear come into his eyes. But just as suddenly he resumed his seat and folding his arms, scowled defiantly at the two men who were watching him so closely.

'I see what this game is,' he exclaimed. 'That man'—pointing to Perivale—'has been wheedling things out of me with a view to charging me with Auberge's murder! Well—charge me! I didn't murder Auberge!'

'Up to now, Mr Hartmore, nobody's asked you if you did,' retorted the inspector. 'All I've asked is that you should explain your movements on Monday evening last, between six-thirty, the time of your arrival at Folkestone station, and eleven, the hour of your turning in at the Royal Pavilion Hotel. Simple matter that—unless you've something to conceal!'

'I may have something to conceal that's nothing to do with this affair,' said Hartmore. 'I did arrive here at six-thirty. I did go somewhere—where is no business of anybody's but my own and another person.'

'But this,' suggested the inspector, 'is your stick?'

'That is my stick,' admitted Hartmore. 'Not going to deny it!'

'Well,' said the inspector, 'we know where this stick was found. Will you tell us what you did with the stick that evening?'

'I shall tell nothing until I've had an opportunity of seeing a solicitor.' replied Hartmore, doggedly. 'As I said before, I see what you're after! You'll keep me here, of course, now you've got me!'

'I'm afraid we've no option,' said the inspector. 'If you could give us a full and satisfactory account—'

'I'm not going to give any account,' interrupted Hartmore. 'All I say is—at present—that if you think I murdered Auberge, or knew who murdered him, or have any knowledge whatever of the actual facts of the murder, you're making the biggest mistake you ever made in your life! And—you'll find I'm right!'

‘I shall have to detain you, anyway,’ replied the inspector, with something of a sigh. ‘I can’t do anything else!’

‘At your own risk,’ said Hartmore.

The inspector made no answer to this veiled threat, and when Hartmore had been removed he turned to Perivale with a doubtful expression.

‘He seems pretty confident,’ he remarked.

‘That may be bluff,’ replied Perivale. ‘Anyhow, there’s the sword stick! Who but Hartmore could have put it where that old Scotsman found it?’

‘Well, I don’t know,’ said the inspector. ‘On his own admission, Hartmore went somewhere in the town on Monday evening. He may have lost the stick. Somebody—the actual murderer, one would suppose, may have stolen it from him. There’s a certain air of confidence about him that I don’t like. However I believe he knows something—probably a lot.’

‘Yes,’ assented Perivale. He began to recollect what the plainclothes man had told him of Hartmore’s movements after quitting the hotel. ‘There’s an inquiry I’d like to make,’ he said, suddenly. ‘I’ll not be long. Do nothing further till I get back.’

He left the police station, and hurrying to the post office got into touch with the postmaster, and after a few words of explanation, asked if he could see the book in which entries of registered letters were kept? Presently the postmaster laid it before him. And there, in the very last entry but one, Perivale saw what he had had an idea he might see—the duplicate of a receipt issued for a registered packet addressed to Mr Marcus Hartmore, 567, Hatton Garden, London. This, then, was why Hartmore had driven to the General Post Office on leaving the Royal Pavilion Hotel.

‘Will that packet have gone?’ he asked sharply.

‘Not yet,’ replied the postmaster.

‘It’ll have to be opened,’ said Perivale. ‘It probably contains a clue—anyway, I’ve got to know what’s inside it.’

‘Better fetch the inspector,’ advised the postmaster. ‘If he’ll give satisfactory reasons for opening it—’

Perivale hastened back; came back again with the inspector; the postmaster listened, nodded silently, and fetched the packet, a small, four-square box done up in a sheet of letter paper and sealed. The inspector began to open it. And Perivale stood by, expectant—laying odds about what he expected to see.

A cardboard box, bearing the address in gilt letters of a Parisian jeweller came to light when the enclosing sheet was unfolded. Inside the box folds of tissue paper; then layers of cotton wool, and in the cotton wool something hard, tightly enfolded. The inspector, his fingers shaking a little, tore aside the folds…

'The diamond,' exclaimed Perivale.

The other men stared at the thing lying in the inspector's palm; neither spoke.

'I'm getting a clear notion of this,' said Perivale, after a brief silence. 'He evidently got the notion today, perhaps after the inquest this morning, that he was being shadowed—perhaps he found out that we were shadowing him—and that he might be stopped at the station. So he slipped in here and sent this thing off by post, to himself in London, lest, if arrested, it should be found on him. But—fancy his carrying it about him since Monday night.'

'He wouldn't,' said the inspector. 'He'd have it planted somewhere. Well, well! I suppose this is the diamond?'

'We can soon settle that,' replied Perivale. 'We'll go down to the hotel and show it to the syndicate. They'll know.'

The inspector put the diamond back in its box, and the box in his pocket, and, after transacting some formalities with the postmaster, accompanied Perivale to the hotel. They made straight to the reception office, where Miss Shepperson and her assistant were busy with their books and papers. A look from Perivale brought Miss Shepperson to the desk.

'Here to bother you again,' whispered Perivale. 'Do you know where the three gentlemen from Paris are to be found?'

Miss Shepperson arched her eyebrows.

'Gone, Mr Perivale,' she announced. 'All three! Left!'

Perivale uttered an exclamation of genuine surprise.

'Gone!' he said. 'Where? Why?'

'I don't know where, and I don't know why,' replied Miss Shepperson. 'All I know is that I saw all three, after lunch, walking up and down outside the front of the hotel, talking a lot. They seemed to be—well, a bit excited, gesticulated a good deal, you know. And a few minutes later they all came in, and the French gentleman, Monsieur Delardier, came to me and said they were leaving, and he wanted to settle the bills of all three, that minute.

He waited here while I got the bills ready, then he paid them, and the three went out. As to where they went—perhaps the hall porter can tell you.'

'Delardier didn't give any explanation of their sudden departure?'

'Not a word. He said nothing beyond what I've told you.'

Perivale went to the hall, and got hold of the hall porter. The hall porter, questioned, shook his head. All he knew was that the three gentlemen, none of whom had any luggage beyond small despatch cases, easily carried, walked off together towards the corner of the hotel.

'Always taxicabs about there, you know, sir,' he concluded. 'They may have taken one.'

'What time was it when they went out of here?' asked Perivale.

'Quarter past two, sir.'

Perivale thought a bit.

'What time is the afternoon boat from Dover to Calais?' he inquired.

'Four o'clock, precisely, sir.'

'And the corresponding train reaches Paris—what time?'

'Nine o'clock, sir.'

Perivale turned to the inspector.

'They've gone off to Dover to catch that four o'clock boat,' he muttered. 'But why? 'The last I heard of them they were determined to stop here until this affair was cleared up. What's happened to send them off in this way? Delardier told me only this morning that they were resolved on sparing no pains and no expense in recovering the diamond. Now—they turn tail. Must be some reason.'

'They may not have gone to Dover,' suggested the inspector. 'They may have decided to shift their quarters to one of the other hotels in the town.'

'No,' said Perivale. 'They're off to Paris. Lord knows why! But we'll make certain. Come to the cab rank at the corner.'

There were several taxicabs on the rank; their drivers lounged over the wall of the harbour, gossiping. Perivale approached the nearest.

'Is there anybody here who took up three gentlemen as passengers this afternoon, a little after two o'clock?' he asked.

A man singled himself out from the others.

'Yes, sir, me, sir,' he answered expectantly.

'Where did you take them?' inquired Perivale.

The man glanced from the detective's smart suit to the inspector's uniform.

‘Well, sir—not far, sir,’ he replied. ‘They wanted to know where there was a garage in the town at which they could hire a first-rate car, sir. I ran them up to Makinson’s.’

‘Did they tell you where they wanted to go?’

‘No, sir—nothing about that.’

‘And you didn’t hear anything at Makinson’s?’

‘Didn’t stop, sir. I just took the three gentlemen there and left them at the entrance.’

Perivale and the inspector walked away.

‘Not Paris, after all,’ said the inspector.

‘No—but I guess I know where,’ exclaimed Perivale. ‘London! And, as quick as they could. Why? They must have come to the conclusion that the diamond was to be heard of there. Well—but do you mind coming back to the hotel for a few minutes, Inspector?’

The inspector minded nothing, and he went back with Perivale, who made straight for the hall porter’s desk.

‘Do you know if any of those three gentlemen from Paris had any letters this morning?’ he asked. ‘Or if any telegrams arrived for any of them?’

‘No letters or telegrams, sir,’ replied the hall porter. ‘There was a small bundle of newspapers for one of them—the French gentleman.’

‘French papers?’

‘French stamps on it, sir.’

Perivale touched the inspector’s elbow.

‘Come into the smoking room,’ he said. ‘I want to look round.’

The smoking room when they entered it was deserted, save for an elderly gentleman fast asleep in an easy chair before the fire. Perivale glanced about him and then crossed over to the corner in which he had held his conference with Delardier and his associates. There were several crumpled newspapers lying about on the padded seats, and he promptly collected them and sat down.

‘Good job that I had my French well drilled into me, Inspector,’ he said, with a grim smile. ‘It’s uncommonly useful in an affair of this sort. These, of course, are the newspapers Delardier got this morning, and I’m going to glance over them. For, in my opinion, it was something in these things that sent those three chaps packing.’

‘Useful accomplishment, Perivale,’ assented the inspector. ‘Can’t read a word of the lingo myself. Near as it is, I’ve never been across to France. So

you think there may be something of that sort, eh?'

Perivale was rapidly skimming the contents of the various papers. He pointed a finger here and there.

'Something about the Folkestone mystery in every one of them—no more, of course, than we know ourselves;' he remarked. 'Most of it's got from our own papers. Hashed up, you know, with special reference to the fact that the victim was a Parisian. But—ah, here's the sort of thing I was looking for—in the *Echo de Paris*. See?'

He put his finger on a sentence at the end of a paragraph, and translated it for his companion's benefit:—

> 'We understand that one of our most eminent detectives is leaving Paris for Folkestone at once in order to investigate the murder of M. Auberge on the spot.'

'Ah! ah!' exclaimed Perivale. 'Suppose, inspector, just suppose that it wasn't convenient to those three gentlemen of the syndicate to be here when the eminent detective arrived? Eh? Lay a thousand to one that's why they cleared out! Now, let's go to Makinson's garage and find out where they cleared to!'

That matter was easily settled—Delardier and his two companions had chartered a first-rate car for London. And the inspector and Perivale went back to the police station, and, after another interview with Hartmore, in which they told him that they had found the diamond at the post office and that he would be charged with the murder of Auberge, left him to consider his position.

'We'll bring him up first thing tomorrow morning,' said the inspector. 'There's the ordinary sitting of the magistrates at ten o'clock. Five minutes'll do it—we shall only offer evidence of the arrest and ask for a remand. Hope we've got the right man, Perivale.'

Perivale pointed to the cardboard box which the inspector was depositing in a safe.

'How else did Hartmore get hold of that diamond?' he asked significantly.

12
The Diamond

Perivale, of course, expected no answer to that question; nor did the inspector trouble himself to give one; some such question had been on his own lips. Hartmore's possession of the diamond was a stiff nut to crack, and at that moment neither the inspector nor Perivale could see how on earth Hartmore was going to crack it. Before night fell, however, they were to be made wiser.

Perivale, eating his solitary dinner in his rooms, got a message from the inspector bidding him go round at once. As Perivale had reached the pudding stage, he set down his spoon and prepared to go there and then. But as soon as he got out of the house his curiosity obliged him to inquire of the messenger, a young policeman, if he knew what the inspector wanted.

'Can't say exactly,' replied the messenger, 'but I think it's something to do with that Mr Hartmore. He sent for the inspector half-an-hour ago, and the inspector, after seeing him, sent me for you.'

Perivale quickened his steps. Perhaps Hartmore was in the mood to confess. He burst in upon the inspector, full of expectancy. The inspector looked up at him doubtfully.

'Hartmore,' he said, before the detective could speak, 'wants to tell us the truth. A few hours' meditation seems to have changed his outlook on things. The question is—will he tell us the truth?'

'We can settle that—ourselves—later,' replied Perivale. 'Of course we can test any statement he likes to make. Did he seem as if—as if he was likely to tell the truth?'

'I thought so! He doesn't want to face things. As I say, a few hours' detention has made him think differently. Well—we'd better hear what he's got to say.'

He picked up writing materials, and led the way to the scene of Hartmore's temporary incarceration. Hartmore, quite comfortably lodged,

sat by a table, twiddling his thumbs, and evidently thinking hard. He glanced furtively at his visitors.

'Now, Mr Hartmore,' said the inspector, 'if you're still in the mind to tell us all you know about this business, we'll hear it. But I'm bound to warn you that I shall write it down and that you'll have to sign it, and that—'

'I know all that!' interrupted Hartmore, testily. 'You could use it against me! But you'll alter your tone, I think, when you've heard what I have to tell. And I may as well tell you, to begin with, that I'd have told it before if it hadn't been for something that—quite apart from all the rest—I must ask you to treat as private and confidential.'

'What's that?' asked the inspector, suspiciously.

'The truth is,' replied Hartmore, 'there's a lady in the case! A lady now resident in this town. I don't want her name to come out. But—as things are—I've no objection to giving it to you and Perivale, in secret, and you can see her yourselves, and she'll corroborate all I say. I don't want to even speak her name!—but I've no objection to writing it down.'

The inspector looked at Perivale. Perivale nodded.

'Well,' said the inspector, 'that sounds satisfactory. But your own story first. If you don't want to mention the lady's name, call her Mrs or Miss Blank, and give us the real name and address in writing when you've done.'

He settled himself and his writing material at the table opposite Hartmore. Perivale took a seat between them.

'Go ahead,' said the inspector. 'Begin wherever you like.'

'I'll begin with my arrival at the Central Station here at six-thirty on Monday evening,' said Hartmore. 'All that I've told Perivale about my appointment with Auberge, later that night, or next morning, is perfectly true; we were to meet at the Royal Pavilion Hotel, subsequent to our respective arrivals there. But I also had an appointment with my friend, Mrs Blank, and on arriving at Folkestone I went straight to her house.'

'Did you drive or walk?' asked the inspector.

'Walked,' replied Hartmore. 'I shall give you the exact location of the house, later, but I'd better say now that it's towards the west end of the Leas. I arrived at the house just before seven o'clock. I had dinner there, with Mrs Blank, at seven-thirty. Afterwards—'

'A moment,' interrupted Perivale. 'Are there servants at that house?'

'Two,' answered Hartmore. 'Two women servants.'

'Did they see you there?'

'Of course! Both of them.'

'Could they speak as to when you arrived and when you left?'

'Certainly! The parlourmaid admitted me and helped me on with my coat when I went away.'

'Well, after dinner?' suggested the inspector, busily writing.

'After dinner, I remained in conversation with Mrs Blank until just about ten o'clock. I may say—as you probably have some suspicion on the matter—that this was not a love affair, or anything of that sort. As a matter of fact, it was an arranged meeting to talk over a very important and delicate family affair—Mrs Blank is a relation of mine—but we didn't want anyone to know anything about it.'

'I see,' said the inspector. 'Well—you've got to ten o'clock.'

'Yes—I then prepared to go; I knew that Auberge would by that time have arrived at the hotel. It was a fine night, and Mrs Blank said she would walk part of the way with me. We went out together and along the Leas. She suggested we should tum down one of the paths—that by the rocks—to the lower road. We went down there, and we had not gone very far, just as far as where the rocks and caves begin, in fact, when we saw a man lying across the path. My first thought was that he was drunk; then I went closer and, striking a match, looked at what I could see of his face. To my horror and amazement, I saw the man was Auberge.'

Hartmore paused, in response to a signal from the inspector. For a minute or two there was silence, save for the scratching of the inspector's pen. Then the inspector spoke, his voice cold and emotionless.

'Yes? You recognised the man as Auberge?'

'As Auberge! The next instant I saw that he was dead. I felt his hand, his face—they were still palpably warm. Then I saw blood on the path. And I had an instinctive feeling that he had been murdered.'

Hartmore paused for a moment, looking from one to the other of his listeners. But he might as well have looked at any one of the four blank walls of the room for any sign he got from either the inspector or the detective—their faces were impassive.

'Murdered!' muttered the inspector, writing down the last word. 'Yes?'

'I rushed back to Mrs Blank who had remained standing at the spot from which we had first seen the body, and told her what I had discovered. We stood listening for a moment, heard nothing—no voices, or sounds as of anybody being about. We discussed matters in whispers, but only for a few

seconds. Then I remembered the diamond! Of course, Auberge had been murdered for that! Now, from long experience of such things, I had a pretty good idea as to where he would carry that diamond, so I went back to his body and felt for a certain pocket in his clothing.'

'Which pocket?' asked Perivale.

'The top left hand pocket in his waistcoat,' replied Hartmore. 'To my astonishment I felt something there—a box or packet. The pocket had a flap secured by a button. I undid the button and drew out the thing inside—a small cardboard box, like a pillbox. I thrust it into my own pocket and hurried back to Mrs Blank. We went up the path to the top road. I hastily explained the situation to her, and said that as there was no one about we had better leave the discovery of the crime to some other person—neither of us wished to be mixed up in it. She agreed, and at my wish she hurried home to her house. The understanding was that she had no knowledge of what had happened—unless it became a case of absolute necessity.'

Again a signal from the inspector; again a pause while the pen travelled over the paper.

'Well?' said the inspector. 'After that? Mrs Blank went home. What did you do?'

'I stood for a minute, thinking. Then I remembered my stick! It flashed upon me that if I were suspected—and already I saw that I might be, taking all the facts into consideration—my stick would be a very suspicious thing to have about me, for I had assured myself that Auberge had been stabbed from behind. So I went down the path again, and, thrusting the stick into a crevice of the rocks, filled up the hole with soil. And then—well, I went off to the hotel. I got there just before, or about eleven o'clock. I inquired for Auberge. But Mr Perivale there knows all the rest.'

'Not all,' replied Perivale. 'What did you do with the diamond?'

'I hid it in my bedroom.'

'After, no doubt, examining it?'

'No, I didn't examine it! I took a mere glance into the box—I saw it contained the diamond, packed in cotton wool, but I didn't take the diamond out. As I say, I hid it—in a safe place.'

'Has it remained in that safe place?' inquired Perivale.

'Until today, yes! Naturally, I wasn't going to carry it about with me!'

'But its owners appeared! The syndicate—Messrs. Spring, Budini, Delardier. Why didn't you hand it over to them?'

‘You see my position! How could I account for my being in possession of the diamond? They’d have accused me at once of having murdered Auberge! Besides—there was another reason.’

What reason?’ asked Perivale.

Hartmore hesitated before replying.

‘Well,’ he said at last, ‘I began to be a bit doubtful as to whether the syndicate had a bona fide claim to ownership in that stone! I suspected them! I know nothing against Spring, but I don’t like his looks. I know nothing against Delardier, but I don’t believe the devil himself could cheat him! But I do know that in Budini I recognised a man who was concerned in some very, very shady diamond-dealing transactions at the Cape, when I myself was there some twelve years ago. I recognised him at once. He didn’t call himself Budini then, though.’

Where is the diamond?’ demanded Perivale. ‘Is it on you?’

Hartmore hesitated.

‘Well, it isn’t,’ he said at last. ‘You see, I began to get an idea that you were suspecting me. That idea got stronger this morning, after you’d been pumping me at breakfast. I decided to get back to town this afternoon, and as I’d a notion that you might possibly—or probably would—stop me at the railway station, I decided to get rid of the diamond.’

‘In what way?’ asked Perivale.

‘Well,’ said Hartmore, after another pause, ‘I suppose I may as well say. I sent it off by registered post, from the General Post Office here, just before I went to the station.’

‘Addressed to—whom?’

‘Myself! Addressed to myself, at my office in Hatton Garden. It’s quite safe—I marked the package *Private*. My clerk will look it up when it arrives tomorrow morning—he won’t open it.’

‘What were you going to do with it?’ inquired Perivale.

‘Lodge it at my bank until things were cleared up about Auberge,’ replied Hartmore promptly.

‘You mean—until we’d found the actual murderer of Auberge?’ suggested Perivale.

‘Exactly! Until there was no doubt about it, and no grounds for suspecting me of it, or of complicity in it!’

‘You think we can do that?’

‘I think you’re poor hands at your job if you can’t. Somebody’s guilty!’

Perivale remained silent until the inspector's pen ceased to travel over the paper. Then he gave the inspector a meaning look.

'I'd like to have a word with you outside, inspector,' he said. 'We can return to Mr Hartmore later. Look here,' he continued when they had reached the corridor, 'before we go further, let me run up to this Mrs Blank's place and test the truth of what Hartmore says about her. Then we can talk to him again—eh?'

The inspector made no objection to this, and Perivale, after going back to Hartmore and getting the necessary name and address from him, chartered a taxicab and went off. In half an hour he was back in the inspector's office.

'I don't think there's any doubt whatever about that,' he said. 'An eminently respectable—and I should say well-to-do—middle-aged lady. She bore out everything that Hartmore told us, and I questioned the two servants as well. So—Hartmore certainly didn't murder Auberge! But now, this diamond! You have it locked up, inspector. Let me have it for a few minutes, and let us see Hartmore again.'

The inspector unlocked a safe and handed the cardboard box to Perivale.

'What's your idea?' he asked patiently.

'Oh, I just want to have a look at this thing in his presence—and I may want it after that,' replied Perivale. He led the way back to Hartmore, and when he and the inspector had resumed their seats, turned to Hartmore with a smile.

'Now, Mr Hartmore,' he said. 'I'm going to be confidential with you. I've got the diamond! I got it from the post office within an hour of your registering your package. Well—you say you never did more than glance at it after taking it from Auberge's pocket? Now, I want you to take a good, professional look at it. Here it is!'

He handed the diamond over to Hartmore, and Hartmore, astonished, seized and stared at it for some minutes. Suddenly he let out an exclamation of sheer amazement.

'Good Lord!' he said. 'What's this mean? This is no diamond! It's—it's an imitation!'

13
WHICH?

Imperturbable as inspector and detective had shown themselves up to then, Hartmore's exclamation startled both out of their stolidity. The inspector, who had been preparing to write again, dropped his pen and stared from Hartmore to the diamond, and from the diamond to Perivale. And Perivale, with a sudden movement of his hand, reached for and took the thing from Hartmore's fingers.

'If this isn't a diamond,' he asked sharply, 'what is it?'

'Paste!' replied Hartmore, with emphasis. 'Just paste!'

'You're sure of that?'

'Stake my professional reputation on it! I've dealt in diamonds for twenty-five years, too,' retorted Hartmore. 'If I'd only examined this sooner, or at any time since I took it from Auberge's waistcoat pocket, I'd have known it wasn't a diamond! But, as I've told you, I never have examined it until just now. I merely glanced inside the box, saw the gleam of the thing in its cotton wool wrapping, and concluded that it was the diamond. But—it isn't!'

Perivale turned the counterfeit over in his left palm, considering it from various points of view.

'I should have thought it was a diamond,' he said. 'Wouldn't you, Inspector?'

'No knowledge of such things,' replied the inspector. 'Couldn't tell a diamond from a bit of glass!'

Perivale let his mind run back over the events of the day.

'Mr Hartmore,' he said suddenly, 'I saw you—this morning, after you left the Coroner's Court—go into a jeweller's shop here in the town. Did you show him this thing?'

'Haven't I just told you,' asked Hartmore, testily, 'that I've never seen it myself except for a mere glance before hiding it! How could I show it to him unless I saw it? No, I went in there, to Relverson's, to look at some

goods I saw in the window. If you want to know what they were—some old silver spoons. I bought them.'

'Do you think Relverson's a judge of diamonds?' inquired Perivale.

'He ought to be,' replied Hartmore, laconically. 'He's an old man, and he's sold plenty in his time.'

'Well, I'm going to Relverson's private residence, to show him this thing, and ask him what he says about it,' declared Perivale, rising. 'I don't doubt your word—you ought to know—but two opinions are better than one. Still'—he paused, hesitating—'what puzzles me is—why should Auberge carry this thing, if it is an imitation? Can you suggest anything?'

'He may have had an imitation made, for purposes of his own at which I can't guess,' replied Hartmore. 'This may be a close replica of the real diamond. They're clever at making these things in Paris.'

'Well—but we'll hear Relverson's opinion,' said Perivale. 'What do you say, Inspector?'

'Seems the right thing to do,' replied the inspector. 'Puzzling—very!'

'What about me?' asked Hartmore. 'Now that you've heard what I have to tell—and I expect you've seen Mrs Blank—you're surely not going to keep me here?'

The inspector looked at Perivale; they drew aside into a corner and whispered for a minute or two.

'Well, Mr Hartmore,' said the inspector at last, 'it's quite true that we've made inquiry of Mrs Blank, and she certainly bears out your story about discovering Auberge's dead body. Of course, you know, that'll all have to come out, later! We'll try to keep Mrs Blank out of it, if we can, but it may be necessary to call her to substantiate your statement. You both acted very foolishly—you should have come to us at once, and you shouldn't have hidden that stick, nor kept things to yourself. However, you can go now if you'll promise me not to leave the town until we've done with you. You'll go back to the hotel, I suppose?—and just bear in mind that I shall be obliged to keep an eye on you. I may as well tell you that we'd had you watched before, and we shall have you under observation again, until this matter's cleared up.'

'I'll do what I can to clear it up,' said Hartmore. 'But I've been wondering—since I saw that thing—if Auberge really brought the actual diamond with him? And how are you going to find out if he did?'

Neither Perivale nor the inspector volunteered any reply to that question. Hartmore was allowed to go away, and Perivale, the imitation in his pocket, went off to the private house of Mr Samuel Relverson, the jeweller. There, after apologising for so late a call, he went straight to business.

'I want you, knowing your great experience in these matters, Mr Relverson, to be good enough to tell me what this is,' he said, laying the supposed diamond before the old man. 'You, I am sure, will know!'

Mr Relverson showed no surprise and made no comment. He picked up the proffered object, weighed it speculatively in his fingers, fitted a glass to his eye, examined it, laid it down and sniffed.

'Paste,' he said, oracularly. 'Just paste! Probably a close imitation of what, I should say, would be an unusually fine stone.'

'They make this sort of thing, then?' inquired Perivale.

'In quantities! Many ladies who possess very valuable diamonds have counterfeits of them, in paste. The real things,' observed the old jeweller with a smile, 'are probably kept in the strong room of the lady's bank.'

'Where does this manufacture go on?' asked Perivale.

Mr Relverson shrugged his shoulders.

They are very clever in Paris,' he answered. 'I should say this is Parisian work.'

'Is it what you call an artificial diamond? '

'Oh, dear me, no! It's paste—a very different thing. An artificial diamond, in lustre, density, hardiness, and crystalline form is practically identical with the natural stone. But no artificial diamond of this size, nor anything like this size, has ever been produced, and probably never will be—all the artificial diamonds I have ever seen are microscopically small. No—this is what I say—just paste!'

Perivale thanked the old jeweller, and pocketing the imitation went out—to wonder what it all meant. If Auberge had been murdered by somebody who wanted to get possession of the real diamond, and if this thing was being carried by Auberge as the real diamond, why had the murderer and would-be thief left it in his pocket? Was it possible (for Hartmore had said that the body was still warm when he discovered it) that the murderer had been Interrupted in robbing the dead man by the arrival of Hartmore and Mrs Blank on the scene?—and that he was in hiding close by when Hartmore withdrew the cardboard box from Auberge's pocket? That might

be. But even then—why did Auberge carry this paste thing instead of the real diamond he had come over to exhibit to Hartmore?

Meditating on these matters as he walked away from Mr Relverson's house, an idea fame to Perivale, and he quickened his steps and went off in the direction of Mrs Volstroem's shop. There was a light in the upper windows, and in response to his summons he was quickly admitted to Mrs Volstroem's presence. And, as in the case of the old jeweller, Perivale went straight to the point.

Volstroem,' he said, 'we spoke, when I was here before, of your meeting with Monsieur Auberge at the Hotel Crystal at Boulogne, and of his showing you there, after lunch, a diamond. Now please to look at this!'

He placed the imitation on the table between them, and Mrs Volstroem uttered an exclamation of surprise.

'Is that what Auberge showed you?' asked Perivale. 'Look well at it!'

Mrs Volstroem bent closer.

'I should say it is,' she answered. 'From my recollection of it—yes! Anyway, it looks just like it!'

'I'm going to take you into my confidence,' said Perivale. 'That thing is not a diamond at all! It's paste! And—it was taken from Auberge's dead body, a few minutes after he was murdered.'

Mrs Volstroem instinctively drew back.

'Horrible,' she said faintly. 'He—he was murdered for—for that?'

'That we don't know,' replied Perivale. 'But those are the facts. This thing—an imitation diamond—was taken from him, as I say, just after he had been struck down. It was in the top left-hand pocket of his waistcoat. Now where did he put the thing he showed you?'

'I am sure it was in one of his waistcoat pockets,' answered Mrs Volstroem. 'The one you speak of, I think.'

'He put it into a box, I think you said?' asked Perivale.

'Yes—in cotton wool.'

'Is that the box?' said Perivale, producing the one which he had got at the post office, now devoid of its wrappings.

'Yes—I recognise the box, clearly! And I feel sure that this—paste or not!—is what Monsieur Auberge showed me!'

'Did he tell you it was a diamond?'

Mrs Volstroem reflected.

‘I can’t say that he actually said it was a diamond,’ she answered, after thinking a little. ‘We were talking about diamonds and precious stones generally. He took this box from his pocket and extracted the stone from the cotton-wool inside. I think the exact words he used were, ‘What do you say to a diamond like that?’

‘And you—?’

‘I admired it, of course: I was amazed at its size. But I am not a judge!’

‘And while he was showing it to you, there were others in the room?’

‘There was a man standing on the hearth, close by, and the head-waiter came in.’

‘They could see what he was showing you?’

‘Oh yes—he made no attempt at concealment. He had the diamond on the palm of his left hand, and he kept turning it over.’

‘Was it then that he told you it had belonged to a Russian lady of high rank?’

‘No—that was later, when we were alone. The man I spoke of, and the waiter had both left the room then.’

‘He never gave you the slightest idea that this thing was only an imitation of a real diamond?’

‘Oh no! certainly not.’

‘But, on the other hand, he didn’t say definitely that what he showed you was a diamond?’

‘No-o,’ said Mrs Volstroem. ‘But, of course, I thought it was!’

Perivale presently went away and homeward. And as he reached his own door, he muttered the conclusion he had now come to.

Auberge never brought the real diamond from Paris!’

But, half an hour later, as he was about to tumble into bed, he got another idea—of a totally different sort, and it made him sit down on the nearest chair, drop his head in his hands and groan.

Supposing the murderer did extract the real diamond from Auberge’s pocket, and put in tts place this infernal paste thing—what then?’

‘That’s a stiff ’un,’ muttered Perivale. ‘It would argue that the murderer was somebody very much in the know! For, as far as I can learn, the imitation so closely resembled the original that anybody like myself, no expert, couldn’t tell one from the other. Well—what will morning bring?’

Morning brought Monsieur Delardier, who walked into the police station demanding to see the detective. Perivale was in, and judged it advisable to

remark that he had understood that Monsieur Delardier and his two friends had returned to France. Delardier spread his hands and shook his head.

'France? No,' he exclaimed. 'We went to London. We wished to make an inquiry, a personal inquiry there. But my confreres, Spring, Budini, they are now returning to Paris; they are just off by the boat to Boulogne, to prosecute more inquiries. Me—I remain here! And your news, Monsieur Perivale?'

Perivale took the Frenchman into the inspector's room, and after a whispered consultation with its occupant, told Delardier everything that had happened in relation to Hartmore, and produced the imitation diamond. Delardier, almost dancing with excitement, seized on this and darted to the window.

'This is not what I handed to Auberge in presence of my two colleagues!' he shouted.

'Paste? Yes, of course it is paste! It resembles our diamond in appearance, measurement, too, perhaps, but then—ah, I do not believe one word of your Hartmore! He has stolen the diamond and put this thing in its place!'

'Why should Hartmore bother to post an imitation thing to himself, in London?' asked the inspector. 'Personally, I believe that thing is what Hartmore took from Auberge's pocket!'

'Let me ask you a very important question, Monsieur Delardier,' said Perivale. 'Had Auberge ever had the real diamond in his possession for any time before you finally gave it to him on the Sunday morning on which he left Paris? Think!'

Delardier thought—and his face fell.

'He had,' he exclaimed. 'Yes, he had it in his possession for three days, about a fortnight before I finally gave it to him to bring here. Yes!'

'Is a term of three days long enough in which to get an imitation made?' asked Perivale. 'Because if it is, I suggest that Auberge did get one made—and that you now hold it in your hand. Monsieur, do you think the real diamond has ever left Paris?'

Before Delardier could realise the significance of this question, the door opened and a policeman brought in a card which the inspector presently handed to Perivale. And Perivale, after glancing at it, looked at Delardier.

'Here is assistance from your own people, Monsieur!' he said quietly. 'One of your famous detective officers!'

14
The Brass Knob

Delardier almost snatched the card out of Perivale's hand.

'Pelabos!' he exclaimed. 'I know him by reputation, that is! As you say, a famous man! Excellent! We shall proceed. By all means have him to your presence, gentlemen! Pelabos! It is good news!'

The inspector nodded to the policeman, who disappeared and presently reappeared, ushering in a little, fat, rosy-cheeked man, who might have been a vendor of cheese or factor of butter, or anything but the astute sleuth-hound that Perivale, who had often heard of him, knew him to be. He greeted the three men with the politeness of his nation, giving each in turn a keen glance—and Perivale, who was watching him just as keenly, saw that he had no acquaintance with, nor any knowledge of his compatriot.

'You have come to investigate matters at first hand on behalf of your authorities, Monsieur Pelabos?' inquired Perivale, in French, after the preliminary introductions and formalities were over. 'We are delighted to see you, and to make the acquaintance of a fellow-worker, whose fame has preceded him!'

'Monsieur flatters me,' replied Pelabos. 'We, too, in Paris, have heard of Monsieur Perivale. But' here he glanced at the inspector, 'we will speak English—with which powerful language I have the happiness to be well acquainted. Monsieur Delardier, I believe, is also proficient—so I learned from one of your newspapers in which there was some account of a conversation with him.'

'Good!' observed Perivale. 'You have read our newspapers' accounts of this affair?'

'All that have been supplied to me! A great many—I am, accordingly, fairly conversant with the facts, the surface facts. But I should wish to know all that is—well, beneath the surface!'

'Better tell Monsieur Pelabos all that has happened, and all that we've discovered since yesterday morning,' suggested the inspector. 'He should be

fully posted.'

'Yes,' agreed Perivale. 'It is a long story, and there are many details,' he continued, turning to the detective, 'but I'll endeavour to compress it and to keep to necessary and really important matters. Well, then—'

Pelabos listened in absorbed silence while Perivale told the entire story as it had presented itself to him at the beginning and had unrolled itself since. He made no remarks, asked no questions, until the narrator had made an end. Then, after a brief interval of silent reflection, he spoke.

'This Mrs Blank, then? Is she a person of probity? One whose word can be relied on?'

'From my observation of her—yes,' replied Perivale. 'I am convinced that she is an eminently truthful woman—she is certainly of undoubted respectability; a well-known resident of this town. Also, her servants were, in my opinion, women whose word could be trusted.'

'I should like to see the sword stick,' observed. Pelabos.

The inspector produced the sword stick from a cupboard, and Pelabos withdrew the rapier and silently examined it. He replaced it in silence, and returned the stick to the inspector, after which, folding his hands on the top of his neatly rolled umbrella, he rested his chin on their knuckles and stared at the carpet.

'What is your opinion, Monsieur?' asked Perivale, after a silence that threatened to grow tedious. 'Your impression?'

Pelabos looked up slowly and smiled—it was the sort of smile with which an indulgent uncle might greet an ingénue who put a question that cannot easily be answered.

'My opinion, monsieur?' he said. 'Eh, well, then, my opinion is that at present—at present, you understand—there is no clue whatever to the identity of the murderer! And I think, too, that any clue that will present itself will be picked up, not here, but in Paris!'

'I'm beginning to think that, myself,' remarked the inspector, lugubriously. 'Hark back—that's what I think. Began before ever Monsieur Auberge came here—in my opinion!'

Pelabos turned on his fellow countryman.

'According to Mr Perivale's admirably lucid account,' he said, 'you, Monsieur Delardier, allowed this extremely valuable diamond to be in Monsieur Auberge's hands for three days, some little time before you actually handed it to him to bring to England?'

‘A fortnight before,’ replied Delardier.

‘Why was it handed to him then?’

‘That he might inspect it,’ said Delardier. ‘The circumstances were these. Myself, my two colleagues, or partners, Mr Spring and Signor Budini, became possessed of this diamond—we have had similar dealings, chiefly in valuables brought to Paris by refugees who escaped from Russia at the time of the revolution and who were anxious to realise on their possessions. This is a particularly valuable stone—we believed there would be a better chance of selling it to advantage in England than in France. Auberge was recommended to us asa thoroughly honest man, and an expert. Spring had knowledge of him, too; personal knowledge. The diamond was in my keeping—I am the active partner in our syndicate—and I entrusted it to Auberge for three days, at his own request. I thought at the time that he wished to show it to others. At the end of the three days he returned it to me, and I kept it in my safe until Auberge’s departure for Folkestone, when I once more handed it to him, in the presence of my partners, Spring and Budini. In each case, Auberge gave me a written receipt for the stone. The first receipt was returned to him when, at the expiration of the three days, he handed the diamond back; the second receipt is in my pocket now.’

Pelabos ruminated awhile. Then he rose, buttoning his overcoat.

‘I wish to know what Auberge did with that diamond during the three days you speak of,’ he remarked. ‘One must find out! But, in the meantime, I suggest that you show me the place at which Auberge was murdered?’

‘We will go with you,’ said Perivale.

Perivale, however, was not to go. As the four men walked out of the police station, a page boy from the Royal Pavilion Hotel came up to the detective and, handing him a note, remarked that he was to wait for an answer.

Perivale tore open the envelope, and hastily glanced at the half-sheet of paper it enclosed.

> ‘Dear Mr Perivale,
> ‘Can you please come down to the hotel? I have made an important discovery and have not yet said anything to anybody about it.
>
> ‘Yours sincerely,

Perivale drew the inspector aside and showed him the message.

‘I must go down there at once,’ he whispered. ‘This is a sharp-witted young woman; she wouldn’t send for me unless she’d some good news. You go with these two to the Leas. I’ll meet you here later.’

He hurried away in the direction of the hotel, and presently walked up to the reception office, to find Miss Shepperson expectantly awaiting him. She gave him a look expressive of a good deal.

‘Yes?’ said Perivale. ‘You’ve found out—what?’

Miss Shepperson leaned across the counter. She was alone in the office, and there was no one about in the inner hall, but she lowered her voice to a whisper.

‘I have,’ she answered. ‘And I was never so surprised in my life! I haven’t told a soul of it yet—not even the manager. I thought it best to keep it to myself until I’d seen you, and as it seemed highly important, I sent for you at once.’

‘Good girl!’ exclaimed Perivale, with heartfelt approval, ‘I knew you were a brick! And—what is it?’

‘Put it down to sheer feminine inquisitiveness that I discovered anything at all,’ said Miss Shepperson. ’At least, put it down to that as regards one-half, and to mere accident as regards the other. Well, it was this way—I happened about an hour ago to be walking along the corridor in which there’s the bedroom that I let to Monsieur Auberge, and that you and your inspector searched so thoroughly, and,’ she added, with a sly twinkle in her eyes, ‘so very ineffectively. And I suddenly thought I’d like to have a look at it—I really don’t know why, unless it was a bit of morbid curiosity. The chambermaid of that floor was close by, and I got her to let me in with her key. And I went in, and just looked round, and within one minute of my going in I found—something.’

‘What—what?’ demanded Perivale. ‘Tell me!’

‘Wait a minute,’ said Miss Shepperson. ‘My assistant’s just coming back—then I’l go up with you. She’ll be here in a second.’

The assistant was not back in a second nor in sixty, but Miss Shepperson’s lips refused to say more until she came. Then she beckoned Perivale to follow her, and led him upstairs to the door of Auberge’s room, summoning the chambermaid on her way. She flung the door wide open

and motioned the detective across the threshold with something of an air of triumph.

'Now,' she said. 'You and the inspector searched every inch of this room, so you told me! You left nothing!—not a square inch!—that you hadn't been over. You're very clever, Mr Perivale, but I'll show you something you never even thought of examining. Come, I believe I could beat you at this sort of work.'

'You're reducing me to—I don't know what!' exclaimed Perivale. 'I can't think of anything—anything whatever!—that I didn't examine with the utmost care. What is it? Where is it?'

Miss Shepperson pointed to the bed.

'You see that bed—' she began.

'Pulled it all to pieces!' interrupted Perivale.

'Perhaps! But you see what a good, solid brass frame it has—real good work! And you observe that at the four corners there are four unusually large brass knobs, which screw on the posts? Very well, Mr Perivale, now unscrew that, the left hand one.'

With a muttered exclamation of astonishment and discomfiture, Perivale seized on the brass knob which Miss Shepperson indicated—to his utter surprise it came clear away in his hand.

'Look inside it,' said Miss Shepperson, 'and turn it up.'

Perivale looked inside the hollow of the knob, and then inverted it. There dropped from it, on the coverlet of the bed, a small box, the exact counterpart of that which he himself was carrying in his pocket, the box containing the imitation diamond. With another exclamation of amazement he tore off the lid of this new discovery. And there was a loose mass of cotton wool—and nothing else.

'Good Lord!' said Perivale. 'And—and you hit on this?'

'Can't say I hit on it,' replied Miss Shepperson. 'I told you that accident had something to do with the discovery. It came about this way—when I entered this room to look round I just chanced—mere chance, you know—to put my hand on that brass knob. It came away in my fingers, just as it did with you, and, of course, I looked at it to see if the thread of the screw had worn loose. And then I saw what was in the cavity of the knob—that!'

'Empty?' exclaimed Perivale.

'To be sure,' said Miss Shepperson, knowingly. 'What else would it be?'

Perivale looked searchingly at her. Then he glanced at the door; it was still wide open and there were a couple of chambermaids in view, busied about the corridor. He dropped his voice.

'What's your theory?' he asked. 'You're a clever sort, you know, and you've got one, I can see. Now what is it?'

'Obvious,' replied Miss Shepperson. 'You know that Monsieur Auberge, after I'd shown him to this room, remained in it for some minutes before coming downstairs? You, I remember, were much puzzled as to why he remained here. He didn't unpack his suit-case; he didn't even wash his hands. What did he do? Why, he looked about him for a likely place in which to hide his diamond while he went out—which, perhaps, shows that he may have known or fancied that he was going where there was danger. And he hit on that brass knob—and slipped that box in there!'

'And—after?' said Perivale.

'After? Why, that's obvious, tool!' exclaimed Miss Shepperson. 'Monsieur Auberge never came back! But somebody—somebody who knew he was murdered—came, and during the night entered this room. And that somebody found the box in that knob, and took the diamond out of it, and put the box back in the knob—and didn't take the trouble to screw the knob tight in its place. For, look here,' she continued, taking the knob from Perivale's hand. 'The screw is not worn—the knob screws right enough. From the time the thief put it back, loosely, until I laid my hand on it, accidentally, that knob had never been touched.'

'I never touched it, certainly,' admitted Perivale. 'I confess, I never even thought of those knobs! Stupid idiot that I am! Of course, I ought to have remembered that they're hollow. And they're of unusual size, these. Well, well! But a sharp girl like you has formed some further conclusion. Come, now, whom do you suspect of having entered this room and discovered the diamond?'

Miss Shepperson gave him a quick glance.

'Why, the man I suspect of having murdered Auberge,' she answered. 'The man who called himself Mr Ecks.'

15
PURSUIT

Perivale considered Miss Shepperson's suggestion during a moment's silence. Then he nodded his head.

'I shouldn't wonder if you're quite right,' he said. 'The worst of it is that if it is really so, the man's got several days' start. Still, look here! Come down to your office and write me out a careful and particular description of Ecks. That will be useful—and so will this.'

As he spoke he picked up the brass knob, which he had left lying on the coverlet of the bed, and wrapping it tightly in his handkerchief, put it in his pocket.

'What do you want with that?' inquired Miss Shepperson.

'Fingerprints,' replied Perivale, with a smile. 'There are yours on it, of course, and mine, but we may get one of the person who found this box in it, and afterwards replaced the box. Oh, we've still a chance, thanks to your discovery! And now,' he concluded as they went downstairs, 'be careful about that description! Put in anything you particularly noticed—you're a very observant young lady, you know!'

'It's a good thing I am, then!' replied Miss Shepperson. 'For I noticed two little peculiarities about Mr Ecks, whoever he may be. One was that on his right hand—I noticed it as he signed the register—he has one finger shorter than the others, though I can't remember which finger it was. And the other was that he has a dropped eyelid—the left.'

'Good—good—splendid!' exclaimed Perivale. 'Put all that in—we shall find particulars like those immensely useful. A short finger and a dropped eyelid—you're a perfect Godsend!'

Armed with the Godsend's carefully written description of the vanished Mr Ecks, about whom he was now beginning to entertain very strong suspicions, Perivale hastened back to the police station, and at its entrance encountered the inspector and his two companions just returning from their visit to the scene of the murder. As soon as they were closeted together in

the inspector's room, he told them of the latest development, and produced Miss Shepperson's memorandum, which he handed to the French detective. Pelabos studied it carefully.

'This may prove of great value,' he remarked at last. 'I have an idea—it is, you will understand, a vague idea—that I have met this man—the dropped eyelid suggests something to me—in connection with some fraud or other years ago—a commercial fraud. Probably he is an international crook! The name Ecks, of course, is an example of his humour. He means the letter X—the unknown quantity. Very good, gentlemen—we make progress! But our progress, Monsieur Perivale, will take you and me to Paris. And there is something I must have to take with me—something of the most important. Those papers which Auberge deposited at the hotel, which are, I understand, in cypher. They can be obtained?'

'At once!' replied Perivale. 'The inspector has got them.'

'My opinion is,' continued Pelabos, 'that at Auberge's office there will be a key to that cypher. We will find it. Auberge's office, as soon as we had the news of his murder, was locked up by us and the door is sealed. We will examine his effects, you and I—and see what we shall see. Now we will consider the trains and boats. You will accompany me, Monsieur Perivale?'

'Certainly,' agreed Perivale. 'I know all about the boats across and the trains on the other side. It is now nearly one o'clock. We can catch the 3.42 boat at Dover, reach Boulogne at 5.30, and be in Paris at 9 this evening.'

Pelabos raised a finger.

'Softly, my dear confrère,' he said with a smile. 'We do not go to Paris all at once! We will go by the boat to Boulogne, certainly, but we will not leave Boulogne immediately. There are little matters to investigate there, is it not so? This Monsieur Ecks, for example, he has two very good quality suit-cases, I think, when he is at the Hotel Crystal at Boulogne? Eh, well, Monsieur Ecks has no suit-cases when he arrives at the Royal Pavilion Hotel in this town, Folkestone! So—I think he left them at Boulogne, eh? And—I think he would go back for them! So—we will make a little excursion into the town when we reach Boulogne Harbour.'

'I am in your hands, Monsieur Pelabos,' said Perivale. 'Whatever you suggest—'

Pelabos drew out his watch.

'At present,' he said, 'as it is not yet one o'clock, and as Dover is—very conveniently, only a few miles away—I suggest that it is the hour for your

very nice custom of lunch, or perhaps early dinner? I am hungry!'

Perivale took his visitor to the nearest hotel; thither, as they lunched, came the inspector, bringing the cypher document, which Pelabos carefully pocketed. There, too, came Delardier, gloomy and distrustful, and still cherishing suspicions of Hartmore.

'Since you go to Paris,' said Delardier, 'I, too, shall return. I must see my colleagues and be there to hear of your discoveries, if you make them. But I am not convinced about this man called Ecks! I think Monsieur Perivale is in danger of forgetting, or has already quite forgotten, something of supreme importance!'

'What is that, monsieur?' demanded Perivale.

'Well, this,' replied Delardier. 'One must look at all facts, not merely one! You are now, monsieur, on the track of this Ecks, disregarding all others. But there is still Hartmore! Ecks passed the night of the murder at the Royal Pavilion Hotel—yes, of a certainty, but so, too, did Hartmore! Ecks had a room in close proximity to Auberge's room—yes, but so had Hartmore! I do not see that there is any more reason to suspect Ecks than there is to suspect Hartmore. And I still suspect Hartmore. We do not know that Ecks knew anything about the diamond—'

'Yes,' interrupted Perivale. 'Ecks saw it at Boulogne.'

'He had the opportunity of, we will say, glancing at it, across a room, monsieur, as it lay in Auberge's hand,' retorted Delardier. 'A mere look! But he did not know its value. Hartmore did. And in addition to knowing all about it, Hartmore had as much opportunity as Ecks had of seeking for it in Auberge's bedroom. But pursue your path, messieurs—I shall pursue mine.'

He went away, still gloomy and disapproving, and the two detectives said nothing of his going. But the inspector shook his head.

'There's a good deal in what he said just now,' he remarked. 'After all, Hartmore had as much opportunity of going into Auberge's bedroom as Ecks had. That's how it strikes me, anyhow. Of course, I wouldn't presume to dispute with Mr Pelabos.'

'We shall doubtless make many interesting discoveries in Paris,' said Pelabos. 'It is there the first chapter was written, eh? We return to the first chapter.'

Delardier was on the boat which carried the two detectives across to Boulogne. At Boulogne, Perivale saw him board the express for Paris, he saw, too, that Delardier saw him and made no sign. On their way into the

town he suddenly remembered something, and turned to Pelabos with an exclamation of annoyanice.

'I am losing my wits,' he said. 'I have omitted to procure the address of this syndicate in Paris—I should have obtained it from Delardier!'

Pelabos smiled engimatically.

'Do not distress yourself, Monsieur Perivale,' he answered dryly. 'That can be supplied with no difficulty—when it is necessary. For the present we are investigating the matter of Monsieur Ecks and his travels. I think we shall hear of him in this town of Boulogne.'

In this supposition Pelabos proved to be correct. Very little inquiry brought certain facts about Monsieur Ecks to light. On Monday evening, October 23, Monsieur Ecks went away from the Hotel Crystal with two suit-cases, in the direction of the harbour station; the man who carried his suit-cases said that on leaving the Hotel Crystal Monsieur Ecks said—in the presence of the porter of that hotel—that he was going to the harbour station. But when they had crossed the bridge, Monsieur Ecks had altered his mind and his instructions; he bade the man carry the suit-cases to a small hotel on the opposite bank of the harbour. There he dismissed him—the man knew no more. But the proprietor of the small hotel knew more. Monsieur Ecks engaged a room and superintended the removal of his two suit-cases to it. He then put the key of the room in his pocket, explained that he should be out that night, but should return next day, and paid his bill in advance. True enough, next day—to be precise, about four o'clock in the afternoon—Monsieur Ecks did return, in a fine automobile. In this his luggage was placed; in this he rode away. Whence? Ah, that the proprietor did not know—who could tell? Still, perhaps the proprietor knew if the automobile was, for example, a hired one? Of a certainty, yes, that was so; the automobile, a very fine car, was indeed known to the proprietor; it had been hired from a garage in the town. But to which quarter of the globe Monsieur Ecks sped in it—that the proprietor did not, alas! know at all.

But the people at the garage knew. They remembered Monsieur Ecks perfectly—why not? An Englishman—with his pockets stuffed full of money. And like all those English that he must have the best and most powerful car available. And he was driven—where? Where, then, but to Paris? To Paris, of a certainty!—where should any English, with pockets full of money, go but to Paris? Paris!—yes!

‘Where there are three million people,’ exclaimed Perivale, remembering statistics. ‘Three millions!’

The proprietor of the garage was sympathetic. Monsieur’s observation was, doubtless, correct. It was a difficult matter to find one man amongst three millions of others. But let monsieur have courage. The chauffeur—eh? Courage, then!

The chauffeur was at hand, and the chauffeur knew all about it—why not? He remembered the English gentleman and his two elegant suit-cases, and the long evening drive to Paris—oh yes! And where he drove his fare to, also!—oh yes, truly! His memory was of the most—’

‘Where, then?’ asked Pelabos.

‘To the Hotel du Louvre, monsieur; where we arrived as the clocks of Paris were striking midnight.’

Pelabos and Perivale went away. The Frenchman was silent, evidently thinking. Perivale was inclined to talk.

‘Pretty smooth and easy sailing, so far,’ he remarked. ‘He doesn’t seem to have done much, if anything, to conceal his movements.’

Pelabos thought awhile in silence before he replied.

‘We are undoubtedly dealing with a clever man, monsieur,’ he said at last. ‘Those who appear not to conceal are often concealing. But we also will now go to Paris.’

But there were no more trains to Paris that evening, and it was not until half-past four of the following afternoon that the two detectives walked into the hall of the Hotel du Louvre. There Pelabos began diplomatic inquiries. But there was no need for diplomacy. Monsieur Ecks, English, had come there at midnight, October 24, had stayed the night there, and had departed thence early next morning. So much the reception clerks could tell. But as to the rest—eh, well, perhaps the porter—?

The porter concerned, duly found at last, remembered Mr Ecks—English. Certainly, who, with two pieces, left early—that is to say, before eight o’clock. Oh yes—he, the porter, got him a taxicab. Did he, the porter, know the number of that cab or its driver? The number, no—there were so many of those numbers. But the driver; oh yes. A young fellow, whose cab was generally to be found on the adjacent rank. To be discovered, then? But yes—the porter knew him as well as he knew his own brother.

Within an hour the taxicab driver stood before Pelabos and Perivale. He, too, had a good memory. He remembered the English with two pieces

whom he drove from the hotel at a quarter to eight on that particular morning—a Wednesday.

'Where did you take him?' demanded Pelabos.

The driver made play with hands and shoulders.

'Eh, well, monsieur,' he answered. 'His command on entering my cab was to be driven to the Gare de Lyon. We proceed, but at the corner of the Place de la Bastille—monsieur will comprehend, at the corner where the Rue St Antoine comes to the Place de la Bastille—he stops me. He goes no farther; he will be set down there. There is a friend he desires to see. He pays me, he takes his two pieces; he walks away, round the corner, carrying one piece in this, one in the other hand; he disappears. And me, monsieur—I return.'

When the taxicab driver had taken himself off, Pelabos looked at Perivale.

'That trail is at an end, my friend,' he observed. 'Ecks is lost in the ocean of Paris. No matter—we shall find him, yet. Perhaps not in Paris—but somewhere. And meanwhile, we will visit the office of the late Monsieur Auberge.'

'There may be something there, no doubt,' said Perivale, gloomily. 'But I wish we hadn't got off the track about Ecks. When the Gare de Lyon was mentioned, I was hoping he'd gone off to Monte Carlo—we'd have had a better chance of laying him by the heels there.'

'I have previously remarked that Mr Ecks is undoubtedly a clever man,' said Pelabos. 'Being that, he prefers to lose himself in Paris, where, as you said, monsieur, there are three millions of people. However, I, Pelabos, have more than once found my man in Paris—and we will find Ecks. But now—Auberge.'

He led the way to Auberge's office, broke the official seals on the door, and admitting Perivale and himself, proceeded to examine the dead man's desk. Perivale could assist little in that search, and fortunately for him it soon came to an end. From an inner drawer of the desk Pelabos suddenly produced and held up a small book.

'My friend,' he exclaimed, 'this is certainly the code in which is written that cypher.'

16
Spy?—Or Traitor?

Perivale looked on while Pelabos turned Pio the pages of the code book. He had no personal experience of cypher; to him the whole thing was as so much Chinese. And he said so.

'All the same, my friend, this, I am convinced, contains the key to the papers which I brought away from Folkestone,' said the Frenchman. 'It shall be my task to decode those papers this very evening. You will meet me tomorrow, early?—then we shall talk further, in the light of what I shall discover.'

'You expect to discover something?' suggested Perivale.

'I expect to discover a great deal,' replied Pelabos. 'Put it to yourself, my friend; this man goes from Paris to Folkestone, ostensibly in relation to his diamond-broking business. Immediately on his arrival at his hotel at Folkestone he causes to be securely locked up in the safe of the hotel office a packet of papers, which, when subsequently examined by you, prove to be written in cypher. Why this extraordinary precaution? My good friend and confrère, Monsieur Perivale, has it not yet struck you that, possibly, Auberge's murder has nothing to do with that diamond—nothing at all—and that these things, these papers here in my hand, written in cypher, have everything to do with it?'

Perivale stared at his questioner.

'I can't say that it has struck me, up to now,' he answered. 'But now that you suggest it—'

'Ah!' exclaimed Pelabos, as he rose from the dead man's desk and bundled papers and code-book into his pocket. 'We shall see—we shall see! Go, then, to your hotel, my dear Perivale, eat, drink, enjoy yourself; at an early hour tomorrow I come to you—with revelations! But—your hotel?'

'I'll go back to that we've just been in,' said Perivale. 'That's all right. At what time will you come in the morning?'

‘At nine o’clock I shall do myself the pleasure to wait on you,’ replied Pelabos. ‘Till then—’

He went off in his bustling fashion; Perivale saw him board an omnibus. Perivale himself strolled back to the Hotel du Louvre, secured a room, dined, smoked a cigar over his coffee, and after a time went out and visited several of the principal cafés in the hopes of seeing somebody or something—Ecks, or the syndicate, or he scarcely knew what. But he saw nobody and nothing of interest, and shortly before midnight he returned to the hotel and went to bed, to dream that he and Pelabos and Miss Shepperson and the inspector were chasing Hartmore and Ecks all over Europe, and that as fast as they came up with their quarry it vanished, and then turned up in another place, only to vanish again as soon as sighted. And then came morning once more, and at nine o’clock Pelabos, rosy and plump, and with a look that was at once mysterious and important.

Pelabos got Perivale into a corner of the inner lounge, and when they were settled down, tapped him confidentially in the region of his heart.

‘My friend,’ he said, ‘I have made a great discovery; and I begin to think that what I indicated to you last night may be correct: namely, that the murder of Auberge on your cliffs at Folkestone had nothing to do with that so very valuable diamond! I say—may be!’

‘You have made out those papers?’ asked Perivale.

‘I have made out—as you call it—the papers. The little book was, as I confidently anticipated, a key to the cypher in which the papers were written. Eh, well, then, here is the result. This Auberge, my friend, was, of course, a man who had dealings in precious stones—no doubt of it—and in that business appears to have been a thoroughly trustworthy and capable man, of some repute in his calling. But he was also something else!’

‘What?’ asked Perivale.

‘I cannot at present say whether he was a spy, or a traitor!’ replied Pelabos. ‘He was certainly one or the other. For what are these papers—or, rather, what is this document which he carried to England with him, car¢fully written in cypher, and evidently intended for the perusal of either your high-placed police officials or some equally high-placed member of your Government? It is, my friend, nothing else than an account of the organisation, doings, and intentions of a certain secret society which has its centre here in Paris, but is of European scope, and is at the moment

specially devoting its energies to the spread of disaffection in your own country—England!'

'Good Heavens, is that it!' exclaimed Perivale. 'You don't say so!'

'I, Pelabos, say it to you! That is it! And it is plain to me from my reading of the document that this is not the first communication of its kind which Auberge had prepared for some person: in London—whither he was probably intending to take or send these papers after finishing his business in Folkestone. It is quite evident from what is here,' continued. Pelabos, 'that Auberge was very much au fait with the secret doings and schemes of these people, whose aim is the total destruction of Society as we know it, and who are fervently hoping to bring about a revolution in your country. And I am now wondering if Auberge was one of two things. Was he a professional spy, who had cleverly wormed his way into the confidence of these people? Or was he a traitor to the cause, seduced from it by a traitor's pay? In either case, I think it very likely that he was murdered at Folkestone not because he was carrying a valuable diamond, but because his treachery, or the fact that he was a spy, had been found out.'

'There is something in it,' admitted Perivale.

'There is a great deal in it, my friend. Remember now—Auberge had not been robbed. He had much of value on him—money, ornaments, the like. Nothing had been touched. According to Hartmore, the box containing the imitation diamond was intact in Auberge's pocket when Hartmore found Auberge. Therefore—it was not murder for the sake of robbery.'

'But—you forget the brass knob,' said Perivale. 'That cannot be got over. My theory is that the murderer—whom I conceive to be the man we know as Ecks—murdered Auberge on the Leas, possibly discovered that the diamond he had on him was an imitation, put it back in Auberge's pocket, went to the hotel, and had the luck to discover the real diamond! What do you say?'

'That all that is highly problematical,' replied Pelabos. 'Your theory may be correct. The brass knob affair is decidedly puzzling. But this cypher business is highly significant. It must be inquired into—in secrecy. Leave that to me. As to the pursuit of Ecks—'

Pelabos was interrupted at this point by the appearance of a page boy, who brought Perivale a telegram.

'From the inspector,' exclaimed Perivale as he spread out the message. 'Good Heavens! what's this?'

Return here at once important information just received which needs your personal attention.

He turned on his companion inquiringly. Pelabos nodded calmly.

'Precisely!' he said. 'In these cases something is always turning up. Well, my friend, the best train of the day leaves the Gare du Nord at twelve o'clock. You will reach Dover at five, and your own town is, I suppose, a matter of a short run in a car. I shall await your news—if it can be communicated—with the deepest interest!'

'And you—meanwhile?' asked Perivale.

'I shall investigate—secretly—the matters arising: out of my discovery of this cypher business, and I shall also cause the most minute inquiries to be set afoot with a view of unearthing Mr Ecks,' replied Pelabos. 'Oh, I shalt not be idle! Courage, my friend—we shall do very well yet.'

Perivale followed the inspector's instructions, and, leaving Paris at midday, was back in Folkestone before six o'clock. On his way across he thought much about the matter of the document which Pelabos had successfully decoded the previous evening. Supposing that the Frenchman's theory was right, and that the murder of Auberge sprang out of his connection with the secret society indicated?—why, then, all his, Perivale's, labours had so far been in vain—he had been working in the wrong direction!

That Pelabos might be right seemed probable, or at any rate, possible from an undoubted fact—there was no doubt that Auberge, when he reached Folkestone, had an appointment with somebody *who was not Hartmore*. Was it with some man to whom he was eventually to hand that cypher document?—or to meet in connection with the matters set forth in it? Who, anyway, was it that Auberge was to meet? If he could only solve that problem…

But all this was put out of Perivale's mind within a moment of entering the inspector's room. The inspector, usually phlegmatic, and often doleful showed signs of excitement; something, it was very plain to Perivale, had stirred him up. He jumped from his chair as the detective entered, and immediately strode towards the door that communicated with another office.

'I knew what time you'd come in,' he exclaimed. 'I looked up the train and the boat. And I've got the man here, waiting for you!'

'The man? What man?' demanded Perivale.

'A Folkestone man, a taxicab driver, who came here first thing this morning with a most remarkable story,' replied the inspector. 'He'd have come

before, but he's been ill in bed, and he didn't know much about this murder affair until yesterday. He's got something to tell, I can assure you. But you shall hear it from him.' He flung open the door, and looked into the other room. 'Come in, Walton,' he said. 'Mr Perivale's arrived.'

A man came in, who looked as if he had risen from a sick bed to come there; a middle-aged, respectable-looking fellow, whom Perivale recognised as having seen about the town in charge of a taxicab. He nodded to the detective, and took the chair to which the inspector pointed at the side of his desk.

'Now, Walton,' said the inspector, 'tell Mr Perivale the story which you told me this morning—about the strange man who hired your cab on the morning of Tuesday, October 24.'

Perivale's ears pricked at that. Tuesday, October 24, was the date of the murder of Auberge. He turned sharply to Walton.

'How do you know that Tuesday, October 24, was the exact date?' he asked.

Walton pointed to the inspector.

'I didn't know, sir,' he answered. 'This gentleman here, he fixed that. What I told him was that this here, what I'm to tell you about, was on the morning of the day that that murder took place. I heard of it early in the afternoon, just after I'd got back from where I'd been. He said that 'ud be Tuesday, October 24.'

'So it would,' muttered the inspector. 'The date's all right. Go on, Walton.'

'Well, sir, it was like this here. My taxicab's my own; I bought it a while since. And as a rule I goes out with it very early of a morning—there's often gentlemen as wants to catch an early train at the Central. Now on that there morning I was out at seven-thirty, and a bit after that going along the promenade top of the Leas, 'cause i've often picked up an early fare there. I saw a gentleman—no luggage or nothing he had, 'cepting an umbrella—come out of one of those small private hotels on the Leas and walk in my direction—'

'Which private hotel?' interrupted Perivale.

'Couldn't say precisely which, sir—there's several of 'em, all of a bunch, like. But I know whereabouts—somewhere opposite the cliff railway, sir. Well, he comes to me and puts up his umbrella. "How far is it from here to Newhaven?" he says. "Matter of about sixty mile, sir," says I. "How long

would it take you to drive there?" he says. "About three hours—at the outside, sir," I says. "You've got petrol?" says he. "That's all right, sir," I assure him. "Well," he says, "you can get me there by eleven o'clock." "Comfortable, sir," I says. And without another word, he gets in and off we goes.'

'There and then?' said Perivale.

'There and then, sir—straightaway. I hadn't had any breakfast—leastways, no more than a cup of tea and a bite o' bread-and-butter, but thinks I, I can get that after I've done with him. And I landed him at Newhaven, sir, at ten-thirty.'

'Where?' asked Perivale.

'London and Paris Hotel, sir—what he told me to take him to.'

'That's close to the harbour, isn't it?'

'It is, sir—opposite the landing stage.'

'Well—anything else?'

'Nothing, sir! He paid me all right, and give me five bob for myself, and I see no more of him. Leastways, not after he walks into the hotel.'

'Did he say anything as to where he was going?'

'He did not, sir. But, of course, I had my own ideas. Across to Dieppe by the eleven-forty-five boat, sir.'

'You're acquainted with the times of sailing from Newhaven to Dieppe?'

'I am, sir—used to live that way myself, one time. Don't vary much, these cross-channel steamers, sir, year in, year out. Though that eleven-forty-five, it sometimes leaves fifteen minutes earlier—depends on the tide.'

'Well, now, Walton, can you describe this man? Tell us just what he was like—as near as you can.'

'Well, sir, what you might call a middle-aged to elderly gentleman; Englishman, of course. Tallish, broadish built, a bit inclined to the stout side, sir. A smart, well-dressed gentleman, sir—dark clothes, black overcoat, bowler hat. One o' those trimmed beards, sir, going a bit grey. Not a gentleman of many words, sir.'

Perivale suddenly experienced an illumination. A name shot into his thoughts—*Spring*!

17
The Private Hotel

For a minute or two Perivale sat silent, staring at the taxicab driver. Then he suddenly rose from his seat. The inspector glanced at him inquiringly.

'You've thought of something?' he suggested. 'Something's occurred to you?'

'Yes,' replied Perivale. He turned to Walton. 'Are you strong enough to walk a bit?' he inquired. 'As far as the Leas?'

'Oh yes, sir, I can manage that,' answered Walton. 'Legs are all right, sir.'

'Come along with me, then,' said Perivale. But as he turned to the door, another idea struck him, and he looked at various books and papers lying on the inspector's desk. 'Got a timetable there?' he asked. 'Cross-channel and Paris services? Good! Hand it over!'

He sat down again and began to study the book, which the inspector handed him. He P= a minute or two Perivale sat silent, had begun to think about certain possibilities, which only a study of the timetable could make clear. If the man of whom Walton had just told was really Spring, how had Spring, who was certainly in Paris on Sunday morning, October 22, managed to be in Folkestone on the night of Monday, October 23, back again in Paris next day, and back once more to Folkestone by nine o'clock in the evening of Wednesday, October 25?

It needed little work on the figures before him to prove to Perivale that the thing could be done, and done easily. If Spring left Paris by the twelve o'clock, midday, train on the Monday, he would arrive at Dover at five, and could be at Folkestone by five-thirty that afternoon. Leaving Newhaven at eleven-forty-five on the Tuesday, he could be in Paris again by the early evening. With Spring's movements on Wednesday, October 25, Perivale was already well acquainted.

He presently threw the timetable back to the inspector, and motioning Walton to follow, walked up to the Promenade on the Leas. He was thinking hard all the time. If the man described by Walton turned out to be Spring,

what brought Spring to Folkestone on that particular night? And why, out of all the many hotels in the town, did he select one close to the place at which Auberge's body was found? That might be a coincidence; again, it might not—there might be some deep design in it which at present Perivale could not fathom. But whatever that design was, Perivale had an impression which was connected with it—the man whom Auberge had mentioned to Mrs Volstroem as having appointed to meet was, in all probability, Spring. Was that appointment kept?

'Now, Walton,' he said, as they reached the middle of the promenade, 'which of these places is that out of which your fare came that morning?'

Walton pointed to a group of houses opposite.

'I can't be sure of the exact house, sir,' he answered. 'There's so many of these small private hotels, and they're all so much alike, that it's a bit of a job to say which is which. But I'm sure of this—it was one of those between that lamppost and the opening of the next street.'

'You're quite sure of that?' asked Perivale.

'Certain, sir. There's where I was with my cab, and it was out of the gate of one of those small hotels that I saw the gentleman come. But which—'

Perivale sent Walton off with an assurance that he'd be rewarded for his information, and, crossing the road, began his inquiries at the first of the small hotels which the cabdriver had indicated. The first three yielded nothing—but at the fourth he spotted his man. The manageress of the hotel, a house capable of accommodating some twelve or fifteen guests, remembered the gentleman very well indeed—a very pleasant, agreeable, quiet gentleman, who came in early one evening, explained that he must stay the night in the town, and went away very early next morning. Name? It was in the visitors' book, of course. There it was, under date October 23—Mr Charles Winter, London.

Perivale looked long and significantly at that entry. He was memorising the peculiarities of the hand writing, while at the same time wondering if the handwriting itself was disguised. He turned to find the manageress watching him with equal curiosity.

'Had this gentleman ever stayed in your hotel before, ma'am?' he asked.

'No, quite a stranger,' replied the manageress, 'No! he explained to me that he had some business close by here at a rather late hour of the evening, and thought he had better stay in the town all night—in fact, he said, he

couldn't get away. No, I didn't know him—but a very pleasant, quiet gentleman. Quite the gentleman, you understand.'

'Exactly,' said Perivale, gravely. 'Now, can you tell me anything of his movements? What did he do after his arrival?'

Something in Perivale's tone made the manageress hesitate before replying to these direct questions. She looked at him carefully and inquiringly.

'May I ask who it is I have the pleasure of addressing?' she asked. 'We don't usually give information about our guests, and—'

Perivale pulled out his official card, and handed it over. The manageress stared and—gasped.

'Oh!' she exclaimed. 'I—I hope there's nothing wrong? Such a very—'

'You'll remember, ma'am, that something very wrong took place close by here on the night of October 23?' replied Perivale. 'You've heard of the murder of the Frenchman, on the Leas?'

The manageress gasped again.

'You don't mean to say that this gentleman had anything to do with that?' she said. 'Murder? Oh, I can't think—'

'It is a suspicious circumstance, ma'am, that this stranger came here on the evening of the 23rd, and left at an unusually early hour next morning, and that a murder was committed close by,' said Perivale. 'However, I may tell you that I am in possession of some information respecting him which is of a still more suspicious nature! You can tell me nothing more about him, than that he stopped here?'

'Nothing but that he dined here, was in and out of the hotel during the evening, paid his bill that night, had coffee sent up to his room at seven o'clock next morning, and left at seven-thirty,' replied the manageress. 'Of course, we don't know where he went.'

'Any more than where he came from,' replied Perivale, with a smile. 'Well, ma'am, you'll regard this as private? Perhaps you'll hear more later.'

He turned to go; the manageress suddenly stopped him.

'Now I come to think of it,' she said, 'there's a young gentleman staying here—has been here several weeks, recuperating after an illness—who was in conversation with Mr Winter that night he was here. Perhaps he could tell you something? He's in the smoking room now—I'll fetch him, if you like? '

She went away as Perivale nodded his assent, and presently returned with a young man, whom the detective at once recognised as the original discov-

erer of Auberge's dead body, and who had been one of the two or three witnesses to give brief and formal evidence at the opening of the inquest. With him, so far, the detective had never had any conversation on the subject of the murder; he did not know, indeed, that Lawson was still in the town. Remembering what the manageress had just said, he turned to him with eager interest.

'I didn't know you were still here, Mr Lawson,' he remarked when they had been left to themselves. 'I fancied you were just a visitor.'

'I am—but one of long standing,' replied Lawson. 'I'm about quite recovered, but I stayed on thinking I should be wanted again when that inquest's re-opened. How are you getting on with the affair?'

'There are some strange complications, Mr Lawson—very strange indeed. Now I've heard of something that brought me to this hotel, where I've just made some inquiries of the manageress. There was a man stayed here on the night of Auberge's murder, a man calling himself Winter, with whom, the manageress says, you had a bit of talk. Do you remember him?'

'Oh yes, quite well. I was talking a while to him in the smoking room, after dinner. An elderly man—at least, getting that way.'

'What impression did you form of him?'

'Oh, I don't know—no particular impression! A quiet, reserved, but quite friendly and genial man—typical Englishman, you know—no great talker.'

'That's Spring,' thought Perivale. 'You'd know him again, I suppose?' he said aloud.

'Oh yes—I'm sure I should. I remember him perfectly.'

'You can't remember anything—anything particular—about him and his short stay here that you could tell me of?' asked the detective.

Lawson reflected for a moment.

'Well, yes, I can,' he answered. 'I saw him outside the hotel that night in conversation with another man. I'd been out for a walk along the Leas, and got back rather late; half-past ten or a quarter to eleven, I should say. I saw this Mr Winter standing beneath a lamppost a little way down the terrace, talking to a man, whose back was towards me—a tallish, slimly-built man, in, I think, brownish clothes. That's all of that—I came in here, and a minute or two afterwards I saw Winter come in and go upstairs. And there was another thing. Next morning, when I was going out for my dip—you'll remember that it was on my way to the shore that I found Auberge's body—I saw Winter again. He'd gone out of the hotel just before me and was a lit-

tle way down the terrace, signalling to a taxicab driver, who was coming slowly along. That was the last I saw of him. I say, do you suspect him?'

Perivale shook his head.

'I don't know what to say about that—yet, Mr Lawson,' he answered. 'As I said before, there are some very strange complications in this case, and the presence of this man is one of them. However—are you staying here a little longer?'

'Indefinitely—it's doing me good.'

'I could count on finding you here for, say, the next week?'

'Certainly—fortnight, for that matter.'

Perivale nodded and turned to go, but before he reached the door, turned back.

'Mr Lawson,' he said confidentially, 'I take it that you are a young gentleman of means and of leisure. May I conclude that?'

Lawson smiled.

'Well—I suppose I am,' he said. 'Yes—that's so.'

'And entirely your own master?' suggested Perivale.

'I am certainly that,' replied Lawson. 'Why, now?'

'For this reason, Mr Lawson! I may want your help. You wouldn't be backward in helping to bring a particularly brutal—and fiendishly clever—murderer to justice, would you?'

'I wouldn't!' exclaimed Lawson. 'Do anything in my power!'

'Well, I may ask you to go with me to Paris,' continued Perivale. 'You can identify the man we've been talking about—Winter, if that's his real name.'

'You suspect it's not, eh?'

'It may be his real name. But it's not the name by which I know a certain man, whom I believe to be the man who called himself Winter when staying here. However, identification is the main thing, and that, you say, you feel sure you can do?'

'I can identify the man we're talking about—that's certain,' asserted Lawson. 'I don't know why, but I was a bit curious about him, and I observed him closely, even to his clothes. I'll tell you something I noticed—he was a very well-dressed man, expensively dressed, but in a quiet, gentlemanly way, and he wore valuable jewellery, though little of it; a diamond pin in his cravat, a very good, but not obtrusive diamond ring, and a handsome, solid-looking gold cable chain across his waistcoat. But in queer con-

trast to this, he had depending from that chain a very strange, odd, what I should call trumpery object—'

'You're a very good observer,' interrupted Perivale admiringly. 'And that was—what?'

'A sort of cheap brass medallion,' replied Lawson. 'The sort of thing—well, at first, I thought it was a religious medal, or badge; something of that sort. But on looking closer, I saw that it was a plain oval-shaped piece of brass, and not over good brass at that!—on which was the figure of a sword, or dagger, upright. I took it, then, to be either the insignia of some society, or guild, or a mascot to which its wearer attached some superstitious value.'

'Good,' said Perivale. 'A recollection like that may be of no end of use. Well, Mr Lawson, I'm immensely obliged to you. And I may take it that if I ask you to go to Paris with me—'

'I'll go,' answered Lawson, readily. 'Depend on me.'

'At a moment's notice?' suggested Perivale.

Lawson laughed.

'Say an hour's,' he replied.

Perivale laughed too, and went off. He was more and more convinced that the man who had called himself Winter was Spring, and that his presence at that small hotel had some relation to the murder of Auberge. But what of the man to whom Lawson had seen Spring talking under the lamp-post near the hotel? Who was he? Not Auberge, for Auberge was a shortish, stoutish man—besides, at that time, Auberge, according to the medical evidence, was already lying dead on the path below the Leas. A tallish, slimmish man in a brownish suit—who?

Late as it was by that time, Perivale turned in at the police station. There, at his desk, still busy, was the inspector. He lifted a gloomy face to the detective, and picking up a newspaper that lay close by, silently pointed to a staring headline that ran across the top of three columns of heavily leaded type. And Perivale, with a gasp of astonishment, mingled with dismay, looked and read:

WHO AND WHERE IS MR ECKS?

18
Is This the Man?

Before Perivale could speak, the inspector spoke, grumblingly. 'That's a nice thing,' he growled. 'Newspaper stunt they'll call it, of course. But it cuts the ground clear away from under your feet, Perivale. What you wanted was to keep things dark about that chap, I suppose?—so as to get on his track, unknown to him. Well, there's everything about him in that stuff, and he'll see it, for it'll be translated into the Continental papers. And as to being widespread here—Lord, you see which paper that is?'

Perivale glanced at the top of the offending page, and saw that the newspaper was a principal London evening journal of enormous circulation. And, judging from a mere look at the article beneath the big heading, as the inspector had just remarked, it had, somehow, got everything.

'I wonder who's done this?' he said, musingly. 'Can't be that chap who runs the local paper; I gave him plenty of warning over the other thing. Must be some reporter they sent down here, specially. But where and how did he get his information? I charged the hotel people to keep everything about Ecks strictly to themselves.'

The inspector's face became more lugubrious than ever, and he wagged his head with a knowing expression.

'Ah!' he said. 'You can charge some people as much as you like, but they've got tongues, and tongues, my boy, won't be kept quiet! Whoever he was who wrote that stuff, he got it out of one of the hotel staff! Squared his informant, of course! Those newspapers, I'm told, will spend any amount of money in order to get what they call exclusive information.'

Perivale made no answer just then. He was reading the article. It certainly gave the show away, clean away, he said to himself, as regarded the mysterious man who had called himself Mr Ecks, of London. The entire history of Mr Ecks's appearance at the Royal Pavilion Hotel, and his disappearance from it, was given with full attention to detail; all particulars were narrated, from the moment of his arrival until his departure to Dover in a taxicab

chartered at the corner. And there were speculations, of course, as to whether Ecks had any connection with the murder of Auberge, and as to who he was, and where he might be now, and added to these were certain somewhat caustic reflections on the proceedings of the police, who, in the opinion of the writer, had done little to trace the movements of this man of mystery.

'Well, they certainly got exclusive information here,' he remarked, throwing the paper aside. 'Just as certainly, Ecks will see it—the thing's sure to be translated, as you say. It'll spoil our chances of getting hold of him, and the chances of the people across there. Can't be helped, however. And Ecks mayn't be the man at all—though I believe he is! I'll have to go back there in the morning.'

'To Paris?' said the inspector. 'On account of Ecks, or because of this new information?'

'Both,' replied Perivale. 'Especially the last.' He went on to summarise what he had heard at the private hotel, and particularly from Lawson. 'I must know what Spring was doing here,' he concluded. 'That is, if Spring was the man who called himself Winter. And I'm convinced he was!'

'Queer business,' mused the inspector. 'What on earth should he come here for that night—just for the night—hurry back to Paris next morning, and come over here again next day? Can't have been Spring.'

'I feel absolutely sure it was, though,' said Perivale. 'I'm going to make certain about it, anyhow. I shall find out!'

'How?' asked the inspector. 'I mean—beyond doubt?'

'This young Lawson will go with me,' replied Perivale, 'I shall find him the opportunity of seeing Spring, and if Spring is the man who called himself Winter, Lawson will know him at once.'

The inspector nodded, and, picking up a pen, began to draw figures on his blotting pad. After a time he looked speculatively at Perivale and spoke, slowly.

'Um,' he said. 'Now, I wonder if Spring had any connection with Ecks?, What do you say?'

'Perivale picked up his hat and stick and strode to the door.

'I'll go home and sleep on that,' he answered. 'All I can say is—possibly.'

He went home and slept—and next morning, by nine o'clock, was in the hall of the little private hotel, asking for Lawson.

‘This is giving you two hours’ notice instead of one,’ he said, when Lawson came to him. ‘Will you go with me by the eleven o’clock boat?’

Lawson smiled, and pointed to a travelling-bag which stood, strapped and labelled, on a stand close by.

‘I knew you’d come,’ he answered. ‘I’m all ready for you.’

‘Then we’ll walk along now,’ said Perivale. ‘I want to call in at headquarters on my way down to the harbour—I haven’t been there this morning, and I’d better have a word or two with the inspector before we leave.’

Lawson picked up his bag and a light overcoat, and the two went off, Perivale, as they walked along, telling his companion the story of last night’s newspaper article. Lawson listened with deep interest.

‘That gives me an idea,’ he said, at the end of the detective’s summary. ‘I told you that I saw Winter talking to a tallish, slimmish man beneath a lamppost near my hotel. Now—what if that man was Ecks?’

‘It’s possible,’ replied Perivale. ‘What time did you say it was that you saw them up there?’

‘I said between half-past ten and a quarter to eleven,’ answered Lawson. ‘I can’t be certain—to ten minutes. It may have been twenty-five to eleven, or twenty to eleven. It was certainly not later than a quarter to.’

‘And you said that Winter came in to your hotel immediately after you’d seen these two talking?’

‘Yes—immediately after.’

‘Well,’ observed Perivale, ‘that fits in very conveniently with what we know of Ecks’s movements! Ecks presented himself at the Royal Pavilion Hotel just about eleven o’clock—a minute or two before or after. He could easily walk from where you saw those two men—supposing him to have been the tallish man—in twelve minutes. It may have been Ecks—which makes things all the more interesting.’

‘Ecks is, of course, an assumed name?’ suggested Lawson.

‘I wish to Heaven I knew who Ecks really is!’ exclaimed Perivale. ‘Ecks—X—the unknown quantity! Of course, he may be a quite harmless, inoffensive person. And he may be some damnably clever criminal! Who knows?’

But in the inspector’s room, when Perivale and his volunteer aide-de-camp entered it, there was a man who knew—or thought he knew. He was a shrewd-faced, keen-eyed, elderly man who sat by the inspector’s desk, talking quietly, and the first thing that Perivale noticed about him was that he

held in his hand a copy of the evening paper containing the stunt article. He immediately guessed what this man might be, and a moment later had his surmise confirmed.

'This is Detective-sergeant Cripstone, from the Yard,' said the inspector, after Perivale had introduced Lawson. 'He's come down specially to see us about that article in' last night's paper. He thinks he knows the man described as Ecks.'

Perivale turned on his fellow-detective with an appreciative look.

There's nothing would rejoice me more than to find that you do!' he exclaimed. 'Who is Ecks?'

The stranger smiled, at the same time shaking his head.

'Ah!' he replied, wagging a forefinger at the inspector, 'our friend here isn't quite correct in reporting me! I didn't say I think I know—I said I think it possible that I might know. Who is he? Well, after reading this article, I think he may be a very clever, tricky chap who's worked in company with various crooks in London, New York, Paris, Vienna and the Riviera, chiefly in connection with jewel frauds or robberies, and who has been singularly fortunate so far, in escaping from justice. Still, he has been through our hands in London, just once, some years ago, and he can be identified—if he's the man I mean, his left forearm is elaborately tattooed, and of course we have his fingerprints.'

'What about the brass knob I sent up to be photographed and examined?' asked Perivale. 'You know of it, I suppose?'

'Yes—no good! It's covered with finger and thumb marks—all mingled and over-lapping. But the tattoo marks should be enough.'

'Yes—if we can catch him,' said Perivale, with a grim smile. 'If! However—what's his name?'

'Name? He's a different name in every place he operates in! We knew him as McEwen—James Alexander McEwen. I've brought a photograph of him taken at the time I spoke of; see if you know anything of him. Of course, it's seven years since that was taken.'

Perivale seized eagerly on the photograph. It represented a somewhat long-faced, hollow-eyed man who wore side whiskers and had rather prominent ears, and was generally extremely commonplace.

'I never saw Ecks when he was here,' he said. 'But there are people at the hotel who did. We'd better call in there—it's on my way to the boat.'

'You're returning to Paris?' inquired Cripstone.

‘At once!’ replied Perivale. ‘The boat leaves at eleven o’clock.

‘Well,’ said Cripstone, ‘my instructions are, after seeing you, to go over to France if necessary, for the purpose of identifying this man if the Parisian authorities get hold of him. So I may as well accompany you now. I daresay I shall be of service over there.’

‘You’ll be of the very greatest use if, in the event of Ecks being caught, you can identify him as the man you’re thinking of,’ replied Perivale. ‘Oh yes, we’ll be glad of your company, Cripstone! But now, let’s get along and show that photograph at the Royal Pavilion.’

The three men walked down to the harbour, and, turning into the hotel, sought the office, where Miss Addie Shepperson was already deep in her morning’s tasks of book-keeping and correspondence.

‘That young lady’s been as good as half a dozen assistants to me!’ whispered Perivale to the Scotland Yard man. ‘Awfully cute, clever girl, knows how to keep eyes and ears open. Good morning, Miss Shepperson,’ he continued, aloud. ‘May we have a word with you? Same old business,’ he went on, as the reception-clerk came to the desk. ‘We want you to look at something—this! Now, do you recognise it as the photograph of anybody you’ve ever seen?’

Miss Shepperson took the photograph, and after inspecting it steadily, shook her head.

‘No,’ she replied. ‘I don’t.’

‘Quite sure?’ asked Perivale. He bent nearer. ‘Think, now! Is it—the man who called himself Ecks?’

‘That’s suggesting it to her,’ murmured Cripstone. ‘I’d rather—’

But Miss Shepperson shook her head again.

‘No,’ she repeated. ‘I shouldn’t recognise Ecks in that—as he is now, anyway. But—this may be a portrait of him as he was some years ago. It’s the same type of face, but if it is Ecks, he doesn’t wear side-whiskers now, and then, of course, the tinted spectacles that he was wearing when he was here make a difference. You’re wanting to identify him, I suppose?’ she went on, glancing at Perivale’s companions. ‘Well, Mr Perivale, don’t you remember the physical deformity that I told you I’d noticed when Ecks signed the hotel register? Wouldn’t that be helpful?’

‘Yes, yes,’ agreed Perivale. ‘We’ll make use of that. Well—you do think that this might be Ecks as he was seven years ago?’

‘It might,’ said Miss Shepperson. ‘Ecks certainly had large ears.’

Perivale said goodbye, and drew his companions away towards the hotel entrance. In the hall he stopped suddenly, confronting the porter who had once given him some information about Ecks. Drawing him aside, he showed him the photograph and asked him if he recognised it.

But the porter didn't. He-shook his head. No—the gentleman was unknown to him. Yet—on reflection—yes, it did remind him of somebody.

'Does it remind you of that gentleman who left here so very early one morning—the one I asked you about?' suggested Perivale. 'Look again.'

'Mr Ecks, sir? Well—no, can't say as it does. Same longish face, though—and perhaps a little something about the ears. But Mr Ecks, sir—he'd a brown mole on his left cheekbone, sir—very noticeable.'

'That's something, anyway,' said Perivale, as he and his companions walked off to the boat. 'A brown mole on the left cheekbone! Miss Shepperson didn't notice that, I'm sorry to say. Perhaps she didn't see it. Well—we've various things to go on, Cripstone, when we arrive in Paris. And there may be news there. I've wired to Pelabos to meet me at the station.'

Pelabos was at the Gare du Nord when the express steamed in at a quarter-past six that evening. His face was unusually grave as he greeted Perivale; his manner was solemn. Introduced to Perivale's companions, he invited them and Perivale to dine with him forthwith, and would take no denial; he marshalled them to a taxicab, and conducted them to his favourite restaurant in the Rue de Capuchines, where he bespoke a table for four. But before the party sat down, Pelabos contrived to draw Perivale aside, and to whisper in his ear.

'My friend,' he said. 'I have news of the most remarkable, the most astounding, to impart to you! Since I saw you yesterday morning, I have learnt a most extraordinary fact. At the time of his murder, Auberge had in his pocket a sum of fifty thousand pounds in Bank of England notes!'

19
Secret Money

Perivale turned on the Frenchman with a stare ‘of astonishment that quickly turned to an incredulous smile.

‘Fifty thousand pounds!—English money?’ he exclaimed. ‘Impossible, Monsieur Pelabos. To carry such a sum—’

‘My friend,’ interrupted Pelabos, laying a hand on Perivale’s arm, ‘I assure you that what I say is the truth. I know, for what you call the fact, that Auberge carried with him from Paris to Folkestone, and had, in his inner breast pocket, in a certain morocco leather wallet, fifty of your Bank of England notes of the value of one thousand pounds each in English money! My friend!—there is no doubt of it.’

‘But why—for what purpose?’ demanded Perivale. ‘Why should any man be so foolish, so indiscreet, as to carry all that money on him?’

Pelabos shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands. Turning, he glanced at Cripstone and Lawson, who, already seated at table, were talking together.

‘Ah!’ he said. ‘That is what I have to talk to you about, and a very remarkable story it is! But these friends of yours?—are they to be trusted?—are they assisting you?—will it be in order to tell the story to them as well as to yourself?’

‘They are to be trusted absolutely,’ replied Perivale. ‘The elder man is a well-known detective from New Scotland Yard; the other is a young English gentleman who has come over at my particular desire to assist in identifying a certain man whom I want to find. And I have much to tell you on that point!—you have a story, and so have I, and perhaps mine is equally remarkable.’

Pelabos waved him to the table.

‘Let us dine,’ he said. ‘We will tell our stories over our coffee—later. For the present—’

He began to devote himself to his guests with characteristic French politeness; Cripstone and Lawson began to consider Monsieur Pelabos a most charming man. So, too, did Perivale, but Perivale became unusually quiet and thoughtful. Fifty thousand pounds—in Bank of England notes of a thousand each—in Auberge's possession when he was murdered?—if that was really true, the theft of the diamond became of secondary importance. But why did Auberge carry this enormous sum—a bulky package, too—in his pocket when he went out that night? Why didn't he leave it with the cypher document in the hotel safe? Did he take it with him for the purpose of handing it to some other person? Did he—but all that, Perivale recognised, was idle speculation; he must wait for the story promised by Pelabos, who, napkin tucked under his chin, was placidly eating, and beaming approval on his guests as they ate.

The coffee and liqueurs came at last, and the cigars and cigarettes, and Pelabos, bending confidentially over the table, began his story, prefacing it by an explanation or two for the benefit of Cripstone and Lawson.

'You must know, gentlemen,' he said, 'you who are not acquainted with all the details of this matter, that before the late Monsieur Auberge walked out of the Royal Pavilion Hotel at Folkestone about nine o'clock on the evening of Monday, October 23, to keep an appointment with some person whose identity, alas! we have not yet been able to establish, he deposited in the hotel office an envelope containing papers, which, when examined, proved to be written in cypher. Those papers were ultimately brought to Paris by myself, and I, in company with Monsieur Perivale, found, at Auberge's office, a key to the cypher which enabled me to make it out. I discovered then, gentlemen, that the murdered man was either a spy or a traitor—now I know, from later evidence, that he was both! I learnt from these papers that Auberge was in possession of the doings and designs of a certain secret society, whose present headquarters are here in Paris; the object of that society is to bring about revolution in the various European countries. I say Auberge was a spy!—for these papers, gentlemen, formed a confidential report to some high-placed person in England; a report exposing all the doings of the society. Auberge had evidently joined it and had become a trusted member, not because he approved its projects but in order to get at its secret working. And he was also a traitor because of a discovery which I made but yesterday!'

Pelabos paused at that, and knocking the loose ash from his cigar, smoked meditatively for a moment or two before continuing.

'Yes, gentlemen, a traitor!' he went on, suddenly. 'And this discovery? Yesterday, there came to me, in secret, knowing where I was to be found, two men who were in the most obvious distress and anxiety of 'mind. They confessed to me that their agitation was of the most painful; they besought my help, my counsel; they implored me to respect their confidence. I desired to know the reason of their visit; they told me that they were aware that I, Pelabos, had a share in the investigation of the mysterious murder of Monsieur Louis Auberge at Folkestone. I was instantly alert! I demanded to know what they knew of that? Then, gentlemen, once more imploring my confidence, they informed me that they were, respectively, the treasurer and the secretary of a certain society—ah, gentlemen, I immediately suspected, I knew, what society!—of which Auberge was a trusted member. I asked them what society that might be; they implored me, tears in the eyes, not to press this question upon them, nor, at that juncture, to seek to know more than that it was a society. I was sympathetic to them, tender even! "Well, gentlemen," said I, "a society, then—it may be for the amelioration of the condition of lost dogs, or for providing coal miners with white cambric handkerchiefs—but still, a society!" You perceive, gentlemen, my object in not pressing them for particulars? It was to acquire information. And I acquired it, I, Pelabos.'

'Everyone knows Monsieur Pelabos to be a past master in the arts of his great profession,' murmured Perivale, gallantly. 'Continue, my friend.'

Pelabos lifted his liqueur glass and bowed to his guests.

'Monsieur Perivale honours me too greatly,' he said. 'I am but a humble apprentice—even yet! Still—I am not without that quality which you English so justly admire—the common sense! And in these cases it is wise, politic, not to ask too much—besides, gentlemen, I already knew what society these men talked of. Well, I continue! I repeat—I acquired this information. And what was it? Ah!'

Pelabos made a dramatic pause, and after glancing from one listener to another, bent across the table and sank his voice still lower.

'This society, gentlemen, is rich! In possession of vast sums, accumulated from various parts of Europe for the purposes of propaganda. Now it was desirable, in the interests of the society, to lodge a considerable sum in London, in one of the London banks. Auberge was entrusted with the mat-

ter. The affair, of course, was to be managed in a secret way; the money, fifty thousand pounds English was to be deposited by Auberge in a London bank in the names of the men who came to see me—when I say names, I mean the names by which they saw fit to call themselves, for they probably have several—Auberge, as a reputable man, was to furnish any necessary reference. Discussion arose between these men and Auberge as to the way in which the money should be taken to London; for certain reasons, not necessary to be explained to me, it was decided that Auberge should carry it in the form of Bank of England notes. Fifty of these notes, of the value of one thousand pounds each, were procured, and these were handed to Auberge, enclosed in a black morocco leather wallet, by my two visitors, the evening before his departure for Folkestone. According to their account, Auberge told them that he should spend one night in Folkestone, and go to London on the following day—in London he was to deposit the money as arranged.'

Pelabos threw away the end of his cigar and took another from his case. He shook his head as he reached for a match from the box that Lawson held out to him.

'Well, gentlemen,' he continued, 'such was the story! These men heard of the murder—they became a prey to the most awful anxiety as to the safety of the money! They knew that as Auberge had been murdered on the very night of his arrival at Folkestone, he must have had the money on him when attacked. Indeed, they began to fear that by some means or other the fact that he was carrying this money had become known to some person, and that Auberge had been followed and assassinated for the sake of the money! Now that idea occurred also to me—naturally! I begged of them to tell me if others of their society knew of this transaction—knew that the fifty thousand pounds had been entrusted to Auberge? They admitted it! It was known to a sort of inner cabinet, a committee within a committee. I asked how many men composed that inner circle? They said five; excluding themselves. But they hastened to assure me that all five were men of the highest probity; staunch adherents of the cause to which the society is consecrated; beyond suspicion. I made no answer to that; but I drew my own conclusions. Gentlemen, in that society there is yet another traitor, and it is he who murdered Auberge! Who is he?'

Pelabos finished with a superb gesture, and then, folding his arms across his chest with equal dramatic effect, stared fixedly at Perivale, who faced him. There was a moment's silence; he spoke again.

'Yes,' he said. 'I demand—who is he?'

Perivale shook his head.

'Stiff question,' he exclaimed. 'But that's an awfully interesting story. Possibly, the one. I have to tell you has something to do with it. But before I tell it, I want you to hear my confrère, Detective-sergeant Cripstone, on the matter of the man who, at the hotel in Folkestone, called himself Ecks.'

Pelabos threw out his hands.

'Ah!' he exclaimed. 'I, too, was going to speak of Ecks. For, gentleman, it will not yet be within your knowledge that there has been printed in our papers today a translation of a most indiscreet article about Ecks, which appeared in one of your London evening journals yesterday. It is most unfortunate. Ecks, if he is hiding here in Paris, as he probably is, will read that article, and will, of course, be still more on his guard. A grave indiscretion on the part of your Press.'

'We agree with you,' said Perivale. 'It is a most unfortunate thing. But Cripstone here has something to tell you, and a photograph to show you. Let him tell his story.'

Pelabos listened carefully to the Scotland Yard man, and looked long and searchingly at the photograph. But like Miss Shepperson and the porter, he shook his head.

'No,' he said. 'I have no knowledge of the man you mean. You say he has been concerned in frauds, chiefly relating to jewels, here in Paris?'

'Suspected of having been,' corrected Cripstone.

'Ah! Suspected! That is a different matter!' said Pelabos. 'No, I do not know him, or of him, nor can I think of who he may be. But, courage! we have a basis to build upon! He has a brown mole on his left cheekbone; a physical deformity of a hand; his left forearm is elaborately tattooed.'

'If he's the man I'm thinking of,' interjected Cripstone. 'But he mayn't be.'

'And yet he may,' retorted Pelabos, sagely. 'Ah, we shall catch Monsieur Ecks yet! I have spread my net for him! But,' he went on, bending to Perivale, 'your story, my friend? It may, you say, relate to that which I have just told?'

'We shall eventually find, I think, that it does,' said Perivale. 'But first I want to ask you certain questions. Since I left you yesterday, have you improved your knowledge of the three men forming the syndicate that employed Auberge to negotiate the sale of the diamond?'

‘I have,’ replied Pelabos. ‘I devoted myself to that task immediately after I had experienced the sorrow—fortunately brief—of regretting your departure. Oh yes, my friend, I know all about those three gentlemen!’

‘Well?’ said Perivale. ‘And what of them? To begin with—Delardier?’

Pelabos spread his fingers.

‘A thoroughly honest man,’ he said. ‘Of excellent reputation—well known—well spoken of. Financially—sound! Commercially—he is a commission agent—evidently successful. Oh yes, he is a good child, Delardier! What you call—all right!’

‘Budini?’

‘We know nothing against him. There is nothing against him. He has lived here in Paris many years; nothing has ever been reported to his discredit. He, too, is a sort of commission agent. According to my report, also an honest man.’

‘Well,’ continued Perivale, giving Lawson a kick under the table. ‘Spring?’

‘Against him, too, we know nothing,’ replied Pelabos. ‘He is an Englishman, of private fortune, who, like Budini, has lived in Paris for some years. But he, unlike the other two, his partners in this syndicate, is not concerned in any business—that is, no regular business—he has, I repeat, money. He occupies a superior apartment in the Rue de Montaigne; he is a frequenter of the cafés; a boulevardier. As I say, there is nothing against him.’

Perivale relapsed into momentary silence. He had told Cripstone the story of the man calling himself Winter; Lawson knew it already. He suddenly bent across the table to Pelabos.

‘Have you seen any one of these three since yesterday?’ he asked.

‘Delardier! I saw him last night, at a café, which he frequents,’ replied Pelabos.

‘Did you tell him what you have told us?—about the society and the fifty thousand pounds?’

‘I did, my friend! Delardier is an honest man. But, as he said, what is that to him and his fellow-partners in this matter? They want their property—the diamond.’

‘What I have to say to you,’ remarked Perivale, ‘I should like to say to Delardier, in your presence. Let us seek him at this café. Our friends here

will excuse us—we shall meet later at our hotel,' he went on, turning to Cripstone and Lawson. 'In the meantime—'

'I shall take a look round,' said Cripstone. 'I might see Ecks!'

'I, too, shall knock round a bit,' said Lawson. 'I may see—a certain man.'

Perivale nodded, and turned to Pelabos.

'At your service, monsieur,' he said. 'Take me to Delardier.'

'Monsieur, my distinguished confrère,' replied Pelabos, 'we will seek him at Le Chien Jaune!'

20
The Yellow Dog

Perivale followed his guide to a short and narrow street which lay between the Boulevard Haussman and the Boulevard des Capucines; a street that had little to characterise it beyond a certain quietness and sombreness. Halfway along it he suddenly caught sight of a sign whereon was painted, evidently by some artist of the impressionist school, a yellow dog.

'Anything notable about this place?' he inquired.

'Nothing, my friend, except one thing, which is in itself of more than considerable note to some people,' replied Pelabos. 'It is remarkable for its exquisite preparation of simple meals. Its omelettes are a dream—its cutlets perfectly cooked—its sauces of a quality that would tickle the most jaded palate—its wines the result of careful thought, experience, knowledge. And for that reason it has its clientele of discerning patrons, men who do not care, you understand, to eat and drink grossly, but are something of epicures in simplicity. Of these, our friend Delardier is one—he has his corner, and in it at this hour we shall find him, with his coffee in front of him, his cigar in his lips, his newspaper in his hand. It is his custom.'

Delardier was in his corner, as Pelabos had predicted. He had a newspaper in his hand, and when he had solemnly greeted the Englishman, and politely waved his visitors to seats at his table, he pointed to it with a shake of the head that denoted misgiving and disapproval. Pelabos anticipated whatever he was going to say.

'You are reading the translation of the article about Ecks that appeared in the London journal of last night?' he observed. 'And doubtless with dismay?'

Delardier spread his hands.

'It is a catastrophe,' he said. 'It will appear in every principal paper in France! Ecks will read it; Ecks will take his precautions accordingly. It was difficult to trace Ecks before; now it will be something of an impossibility.

Your Press, Monsieur Perivale—ah, I shall not wound your feelings as an Englishman by saying what I think of this indiscretion.'

'You couldn't possibly say more than I feel about it, Monsieur Delardier,' said Perivale. 'It's about the most foolish thing I ever knew of, and you may be assured that it wasn't done with my approval nor with that of our police authorities. It's just a newspaper stunt—and it's done, worse luck! Still, after all, it may do some good.'

How so, then?' asked Delardier.

'It will draw the attention of an enormous number of people to Ecks,' said Perivale. 'That's not a bad description of him that's given there—even to his clothes.'

'Clothes! He can change those! And if he is the clever man I take him to be, he will know not only something about disguise, but about means of carrying himself to some place where neither your police, Monsieur Perivale, nor ours, will be able to lay hands on him! And,' concluded Delardier, mournfully, 'with him will go—the diamond!'

Perivale glanced at Pelabos. And Pelabos nodded at Perivale, as if to give him a lead in whatever conversation was to ensue.

'Monsieur Delardier,' said Perivale, 'I wish to ask you a plain question. What do you now think, in view of certain information which our friend here tells me he has given you in relation to certain moneys carried by Auberge on behalf of a society to which he seems to have belonged? A vast sum of money! And—a diamond of great value! Both missing! Where are they?—in your present opinion, Monsieur, now that you know additional facts?'

Delardier leaned back in his seat, smoked meditatively, sipped his coffee meditatively, and kept silence for a couple of minutes. Eventually, he leaned forward, tapping the surface of the table.

'My opinion, monsieur, is this!' he said with emphasis. 'There are two men who know where the money is and where the diamond is! Know!—because both money and diamond are in their possession or have been placed by them where they can lay hands on both at a convenient moment. Two men!'

'And they are—?' asked Perivale.

Delardier tapped the table again.

'One, Ecks,' he replied. 'The other—Hartmore!'

Perivale started. He had given up all theories relating to Hartmore.

'You still think that Hartmore was implicated?' he asked.

'I still think Hartmore is guilty,' replied Delardier. 'Yes!'

'Do you think he was in league with Ecks?'

'I do. Put to yourself, my friend, all the circumstances—the circumstances, at any rate, as they present themselves to me. Is it by mere coincidence, by sheer accident, that these two men, Hartmore and Ecks, appear at the same hotel on the same night, that Auberge, with our diamond and a roll of Bank of England notes, worth fifty thousand pounds in his pockets, comes there? No, no! It is an affair of arrangement! Monsieur, I know some of your English expressions—it is a put up job!'

It was evident that Delardier was fixed in his opinion, and for the moment Perivale made no answer. He turned to Pelabos and whispered.

'You told him about the imitation diamond found in Hartmore's possession? Yes? Well, what did he say?'

'That it was all part of Hartmore's cunning! That Hartmore had tricked you,' replied Pelabos. 'That Hartmore had an object in all that—to throw dust in your eyes!'

'Then I say nothing to him as regards that part,' whispered Perivale. 'It is no good. Now we go on to the more serious matter. Monsieur Delardier,' he continued, raising his voice, 'you will pardon my whispered communication to my colleague? Now I want to ask you a particularly delicate question—you will forgive me if it seems to be verging on the offensive; it is not meant to be. It is just this—have you entire confidence in the good faith of your two partners in this business?'

Delardier looked his surprise.

'I will not be offended, monsieur,' he said. 'After all, it is your business! My partners? Spring? Budini? In both—certainly!'

'They are men of whom you have a good opinion?'

'I have no reason to entertain any other, monsieur! Oh yes, the highest opinion!'

'Well, Monsieur Delardier, I shall be obliged to tell you something! But first, certain questions. It was in the presence of Spring and Budini that you handed the diamond to Auberge? Very well—when was that?'

'On the morning of Sunday, October 22.'

'On which day, immediately after he had received the diamond, Auberge left for Boulogne and Folkestone. On the following Wednesday, having

heard the news from Folkestone, you, Spring and Budini left Paris and travelled to England—is it not so?'

'Precisely! We left Paris by the four o'clock train and arrived at Folkestone a little before nine o'clock that evening.'

'That, I suppose, was the result of a consultation between the three of you, after hearing the news about Auberge? Now, where and at what time on that Wednesday did you hold that consultation?'

'Where? At my office! What time? Noon!'

'The noon of Wednesday, October 25. Now, Monsieur Delardier, please to let your recollection go back to the three preceding days! Between the hour on Sunday morning, the 22nd, on which you handed the diamond to Auberge in Spring's presence, and noon on Wednesday, the 25th, *did you ever see Spring*?'

Perivale spoke the last five words with such concentration and emphasis of tone that Delardier started in his seat. His face paled.

'Did I—?' he began. 'Did—what does this mean?' he gasped. 'See—'

'You know whether you did or did not,' said Perivale. 'Think!'

'No!' replied Delardier. 'No, then, I did not! From the moment of Auberge's departure on Sunday until our meeting on Wednesday, I neither saw Spring nor Budini. We had no occasion for any meeting. But, monsieur, why this question?'

Perivale bent closer across the table, lowering his voice.

'Monsieur. I am going to tell you what I have already told Pelabos here! I have the strongest reasons for suspecting that Spring was in Folkestone on the evening and night of the murder of Auberge, and that he knows something of the truth about it!'

Delardier gasped again. His cigar had gone out. For a second he sat staring at it, as if scarcely comprehending what it was. Suddenly he threw it aside, and collecting himself smiled—incredulously.

'Impossible, monsieur! Spring?—in Folkestone, the night of Auberge's murder? No, no!—you have—eh, what is your expression?—you have got hold of the wrong end of the stick!'

'I think not,' said Perivale, confidently. 'We shall see! My present information, monsieur, leads me to believe that Spring travelled from Paris to Folkestone on Monday, October 23, spent Monday evening and night at a small private hotel within a hundred yards of the scene of Auberge's murder, left that hotel at an unusually early hour on the following morning,

Tuesday, October 24, and, travelling by way of Newhaven and Dieppe, was back in Paris in the evening. But I will give you the details, and describe the man.'

It was very plain to both detectives that Delardier was already greatly concerned. He had become very pale at the first mention of suspicion in connection with Spring, and now as Perivale quietly marshalled and presented his facts, his face began to betray his emotion. And as Perivale finished, he suddenly burst into speech, more or less broken.

Messieurs,' he exclaimed, haltingly. 'I+ oh, messieurs, if this is so, I—ah, then I am ruined! Yet it cannot be! No, I cannot believe it! Spring, he is the English gentleman! Ah! I begin to fear—I begin to dread—oh, messieurs, I do not know what I am to think of this! It is—'

'What do you mean by saying that if this is true you will be ruined?' asked Perivale.

'I mean this, monsieur! That diamond—now lost—was, it is true, purchased by Spring, Budini, and myself from a Russian of exceeding high rank in whose family it had remained since the time of the great Catherine—I believe she gave it to one of her favourites, an ancestor of the exalted personage from whom we bought it; certainly it has a history. But the amount of the purchase price; ah, the greater portion of it was found by me. Perhaps it is no good now to avoid particulars—the amount we paid to the Russian, messieurs, was ten thousand pounds English money. But of that ten thousand, I, Delardier, provided six. Spring and Budini provided but two thousand each. And—I cannot afford to lose my money, my six thousand pounds! It was my hope to make a great profit. I estimated the diamond to be worth—ah, well, we confidently expected to get at least twenty-five thousand English pounds for it. And now—'

He paused to wipe away a furtive tear, and then, turning to Perivale, gazed at him with pathetic anxiety.

'You believe this about Spring?' he asked. 'And you think that he was in league with the man who called himself Ecks? Ah, if that is so—'

'Monsieur Delardier,' interrupted Pelabos. 'Do you know where. Spring is to be found? You know his address?'

'I know his address. But he is not to be found there at this hour—he is, yes, what they call a night-bird; he keeps late hours. Still, I know of places where he can be seen. And I must see him—tonight. The suspense is too painful. Messieurs, do not ask to accompany me! I will control myself—

I will be diplomatic—secret—cunning! But—I will find out the truth! And tomorrow—'

'You will report to us if this is true—that Spring was in Folkestone at the time detailed to you?' asked Pelabos. 'You know where to find me, Monsieur Delardier?'

'I know where to find you, monsieur—oh yes!—and I will not fail to report to you what I discover. Discover the truth I must! Ah, do not fear, messieurs—I will be as discreet, as secret, as you could wish. And if I have been deceived, tricked—ah, you shall see of what I am capable!'

He made his adieux and went away. Pelabos glanced at Perivale. Perivale shook his head.

'He will get nothing out of Spring,' he said. 'I think we ought to have followed him.'

'No!' replied Pelabos. 'It is better that we leave him to approach Spring—in the first instance. He is a man of his word, Delardier—he will tell us tomorrow where Spring is to be found; then you can take your young English friend to see him. If he positively identifies him as the man of whom we have been talking, the mysterious Mr Winter—'

'Yes, and I've no doubt he will—when he sees Mr Winter,' interrupted Perivale. 'But—' he paused, and became silent. 'I'm not sure we've done right,' he said at last. 'I'm uneasy about it. We ought to have kept an eye on Delardier. If Spring gets an idea—'

'No,' replied Pelabos, 'Delardier will be discreet!'

Perivale said no more. But he had a premonition of coming evil, and he was not surprised when, at seven o'clock next morning, Pelabos was brought to his room.

'My friend,' announced Pelabos, 'you were right, and I was wrong, last night! We ought to have followed Delardier. There is a terrible tragedy! Delardier has been murdered!'

21
THREE

Perivale had been but half awake when he opened his door to admit Pelabos, but he was alert enough when the Frenchman's last word drove in on his consciousness, and his alertness showed itself in his action.

'Murdered!' he exclaimed, reaching for his nearest garments, and beginning to divest himself of his night wear. 'That's Spring! But—details?'

'I know little as yet, my friend,' replied Pelabos, with a shrug of his shoulders. 'As soon as I had assured myself of this lamentable fact, I hastened to you. But it is a fact! I have seen Delardier's remains. My friend, he has been assassinated in precisely the same way in which Auberge was assassinated! He had been run through the heart from behind—a clean thrust through the back! That, in itself, is sufficient to show that the two murders are the work of one hand.'

'But where did it take place?' demanded Perivale. 'And when?'

'The facts, as I have learnt them, are, briefly, these,' said Pelabos. 'You are, of course, well acquainted with the Champs-Élysées? You are aware that at the west side of the Place de la Concorde, there are trees, little plantations, shrubberies, gardens laid out, *kiosques*, between the Avenue Gabriel and the Avenue de Champs Élysées? Well, my friend, at an early hour of this morning, a workman, passing through this public place, saw, lying near a seat in one of the alleys, the body of a man. He approached it; he bent over it; the man was dead! You conceive the situation! The workman hastens to find help; he encounters a policeman; they hasten to the spot; yes, indeed, the man is dead, and there is blood—he has been assassinated! And in cowardly fashion—stabbed from behind, when, without doubt, he was unsuspecting! My friend, it is a repetition of the Folkestone affair! And the murderer—Ecks or Spring!'

'Spring!' muttered Perivale. 'Delardier was going to find Spring! He found him! He told Spring too much. We have made a mistake, Pelabos! We should.not have allowed Delardier to go on that expedition. He has put

Spring in possession of certain facts, and he himself has paid for it with his life, and we are in the position of knowing that Spring is acquainted with our designs on him! A big mistake!'

'To be repaired by instant action, my friend,' said Pelabos. 'Already, early as it is, I have been able to do something. The description of Spring has been sent out in all directions; the railway stations are being watched—'

'Too late!' muttered Perivale, putting the finishing touches to his hasty toilet. 'He has had many hours' start! Besides, he wouldn't trust to railways. But what else in that way?'

'A domiciliary visit has already been paid to his apartment,' continued Pelabos. 'It was, of course, fruitless—'

'It would be,' growled Perivale. 'But—was nothing learnt there?'

'This—that, according to the concierge, Monsieur Spring, in keeping with his usual custom, left his apartment at five o'clock yesterday afternoon, no doubt for his favourite café. It was his custom to return between half-past eleven and midnight; last night he did not return.'

'Naturally, knowing what he did know!' muttered Perivale. 'Well—what did the medical men say? How long had Delardier been dead when found? For that's a highly important matter!'

'They are of opinion, from a first hasty examination, that he had been dead since between eleven and twelve o'clock last night,' replied Pelabos.

'Well, look at that, now!' exclaimed Perivale. 'Hours and hours of a start! Of course, Spring'll be out of Paris long since!'

Pelabos displayed some signs of doubt.

'My friend,' he remarked. 'It may not have been Spring. There is the mysterious person whom we know as Ecks!'

'No, it is Spring!' declared Perivale. 'I feel it in my very bones that it is Spring.'

'Put it to yourself that it may have been Ecks, supplied with information by Spring,' suggested Pelabos. 'Ecks is, presumably, an individual who works secretly and in darkness.'

'There's a damned sight too much darkness about the whole thing to suit me,' growled Perivale. 'Well, let's see if we can throw a bit of illumination on it. Give me time to swallow my coffee and eat a roll, and then let us do something—anything!'

'I, too, have not yet broken my fast,' remarked Pelabos mournfully. 'The occasion was too eventful. I flew to action—I called on all my energies—

my friend, I have had two hours of the most strenuous.'

'Then come down with me and break it,' said Perivale. 'No good working on an empty stomach! I'll rouse out the other two,' he continued, as they left the room. 'Lawson will be useful—he can identify Spring at sight.'

'There is always the possibility of clever disguise,' remarked Pelabos. 'If it is Spring, he will have adopted unusual precautions. Still, courage!'

Perivale hastened to call Cripstone and Lawson. Presently they joined the two detectives over their coffee; the four men began to discuss ways and means. Pelabos, despite his recent admonition to be courageous, was despondent.

'With the death of Delardier,' he remarked, 'we find ourselves in the position of the man deprived of his right hand. Delardier was in possession of truths which now we cannot ascertain. There is, for example, the third man—Budini. We do not know where he lives!'

'It can be found out,' said Perivale. 'Budini must be found! It is possible that Budini knows something. Anyway, he can probably assist in the search for Spring. Decidedly, Budini must be unearthed, and quickly.'

Pelabos groaned—at the same time adding extra lumps of sugar to his coffee.

'That we may have light!' he ejaculated fervently. 'Light! illumination! that is what we require, my friends! Light!'

'Have to do the lighting ourselves, I reckon,' remarked Cripstone, 'And the spadework, too.'

Perivale said nothing. He was certain of this—that something would turn up in the course of the day; something that would help. Before noon the something came in the person of a taxicab driver, who, after being shown the body of Delardier at his own request, affirmed positively that it was that of a man who engaged him the previous evening—oh yes, without doubt it was that man.

Where did he engage you?' demanded Perivale.

'At the corner of the Rue Vignon, monsieur—the corner opening on the Rue des Capucines.'

This was within a stone's throw—figuratively—of the Chien Jaune; Perivale began to take courage.

'And at what hour was that?' he asked.

'At a quarter to ten, monsieur—to the minute.'

This again was promising; Delardier had parted from Perivale and Pelabos at twenty-five minutes to ten.

'Well,' continued Perivale, 'where did you take him after he had engaged you?'

'Monsieur is, naturally, acquainted with the Boulevard de Clichy?' replied the taxicab driver. 'Well, monsieur, there, to the corner of the Rue Fontaine. Arrived at that corner, he bade me wait. He then disappeared—that is to say, monsieur, he walked some little way along and entered, it may have been a café. I waited.'

'He returned, of course?'

'As monsieur says, he returned. But not alone. There was with him another. They enter my cab—'

'Hold! Before saying more, describe for us the other. His appearance, then?'

'Monsieur, without doubt, an Italian. Of an olive complexion, dark moustache, fine teeth—I saw him smiling as they came up. Oh yes, an Italian.'

'Well, and what then?'

'The man whose dead body I have just seen—with regret, monsieur, for he was a generous one, monsieur understands—he bade me drive to the front of the Madeleine. I drove there. The two dismounted; the man now dead paid me; they walked away, rapidly.'

'In what direction?'

'It seemed to me that they made for the Rue Royale, monsieur. But I had turned away before they had traversed many yards.'

'And that, of course, was the last you saw of them?'

'Of the Italian, yes, monsieur. Of the other—until I saw what I have just seen, his dead body.'

'That's Budini he described,' remarked Perivale. 'Budini must be found. But can we find where Budini and Delardier went after they left the taxicab in front of the Madeleine? Evidently, after leaving us, Delardier made up his mind to see Budini before he saw Spring. He found Budini; he carried him off. I think they repaired to some place at which Spring was likely to be discovered; probably in the vicinity of the Rue Royale. Where is that place?'

'There are so many!' sighed Pelabos. 'Still—courage!'

Perivale was a believer in the combing-out process. With a steady persistence, which made his companion compliment him on his British qualities

of thoroughness and perseverance, he went from one café to another in the quarter under suspicion, questioning, examining, suggesting. And at the end of the afternoon he had his reward. In a small café in a side street, a little north of the Champs-Élysées he found a proprietor who was able to give him information about the three men, and all the more eager to give it after being shown a photograph of Delardier.

'I recognise it at once, messieurs!' he said. 'Yes, he entered my establishment last night, poor fellow! The time—it would be about a quarter-to-eleven. Not alone, no! With him another, a tallish, dark-complexioned man, fine hair and teeth, a black moustache—not a Frenchman, messieurs will understand—Italian, perhaps, or Greek. They take seats—they refresh themselves—they smoke—always they talk, amicably, sometimes excitedly. The man whose portrait you showed me, it is he who is most excited; he appears to be explaining something; the other man, he seems to be incredulous, or doubtful. Eventually, he goes away.'

'Goes away!' exclaimed Perivale. 'The man you took to be an Italian?'

'The same, monsieur. He yawns, he seems as if no longer interested; in short, he goes. A friendly parting, monsieur understands—some mention of tomorrow. But the other man, this—he remains. Remains, monsieur, until it is a quarter-to-twelve; midnight. Then enters another. One, monsieur, whom the man who had remained was evidently expecting, for he immediately runs to meet him. They seat themselves—'

'Pardon!' interrupted Perivale. 'This third man, the last who entered, is he known to you?'

'I know him, monsieur! He is one who has patronised my establishment occasionally, usually at a late hour. Monsieur will understand—for a little supper after the theatres have closed. Oh yes—he is familiar to me, in that way. But I do not know his name. A tall, well-built man, and, I think, an Englishman, of a certain age. Not elderly, but of a respectable middle-age.'

'Well?' inquired Perivale, certain that the man described was Spring. 'These two sat down, and, I suppose, talked?'

'Not for long, monsieur! The man who had just entered did not on this occasion pursue his usual custom and sup. He seemed about to give his order to the waiter, monsieur; then something that the other man said appeared to change his intention. He had a drink, instead; he spoke some word to his companion; they left.'

'In company?'

‘In company, monsieur.’

‘And that would be—what time?’

‘Midnight, monsieur!’

‘Do you know in which direction they turned?’ inquired Perivale.

The proprietor answered with a decisive nod.

‘I am able to assure monsieur on that point,’ he replied. ‘I happened to be standing at my door when they left. Towards the Champs-Élysées, monsieur! But ere they had well passed out, another man joined them.’

Perivale contrived to nudge the elbow of Pelabos, who was listening intently.

‘Another man, eh?’ he said.

‘Another, monsieur! When I say joined them, I should say, rather, that he approached the man who had come last—the elderly man. They spoke—there was what I took to be an introduction—they all went away together.’

‘Can you describe the man who thus joined them outside?’ asked Perivale.

‘I noticed him but little, monsieur. Still, I have a good recollection of a face. He wore coloured spectacles. A tallish, slightly-built man.’

Perivale presently led Pelabos away.

‘That’s Ecks,’ he said. ‘Ecks and Spring are in combination! What the devil are we to do to get hold of them? Now then—did Ecks murder Delardier, or was it Spring?’

‘My friend, I said this morning that I suspect Ecks!’ remarked Pelabos. ‘We will rake Paris for Ecks!’

‘Don’t be too sure that either Ecks or Spring is in Paris!’ retorted Perivale, cynically. ‘I should say they’re a long way out, by this time. And where’s Budini?’

‘He left Pelabos then to join Cripstone and Lawson, and eat his much-needed dinner. But that was scarcely over when Pelabos appeared again—full of mystery.’

‘My friend,’ he whispered. ‘Come with me! Those men of the society?—they wish to see both of us!’

22
Do You Know Mr Ecks?

In his time Perivale, although still a young man, man, had experienced many strange adventures in which daring prefaced danger. But he felt a distinct thrill on hearing Pelabos's invitation. He knew already that the society which had been vaguely mentioned to him was, in real fact, one of those secret organisations which have for their object the undermining and overthrow of settled government; its officials, therefore, must necessarily be dark and desperate men, the sort that one associates in one's mind with bombs, daggers, automatic pistols, poison. He looked up at his French confrère with interest, not unmixed with that spice of possible danger which lends zest to an excursion into the unknown.

'Where are we to see them?' he asked. 'And—need one go armed?'

He was thinking of a certain revolver which lay in his suit-case upstairs; brought with him in case of need. But Pelabos smiled—and not enigmatically.

'Come!' he replied. 'It is not a case of arming! You will see!'

Greatly to Perivale's surprise, Pelabos instead of leading him from the hotel, conducted him to a quiet corner of one of its lounges. There, placidly smoking cigarettes, sat two men, in whose direction the Frenchman nodded silently.

'Behold them, my friend,' he whispered. 'There you see two individuals who, in all probability, are two of the most dangerous men in Europe, perhaps in the world! At any other time, eh? But they have given me their confidence, and I have pledged my word to them—I have also taken the liberty of pledging yours. They will, in consequence, speak to us freely—and we shall profit by it. Advance then—I shall present you!'

Perivale took careful stock of the two visitors as Pelabos led him towards their corner. Had he known nothing of them he would have set them down as two typical, inoffensive, peace loving bourgeois, who, the business of the day over, had turned into that lounge to sip coffee and smoke tobacco.

Eminently respectable persons!—the sort you would see, any time on Sundays, in company with mamma and the babies, throwing buns to the bears in the Jardin des Plantes or drinking something innocent outside a café. And as respectable as their appearance were their manners; quiet, courteous, easy. They were charmed to have the honour of meeting one so eminent in his profession as Monsieur Perivale, grateful to their good friend, Monsieur Pelabos, for his kindness in affording them that opportunity; it was kind of Monsieur Perivale to take some interest in their affairs, their misfortune. But perhaps it hinged on the affair with which Monsieur Perivale—and Monsieur Pelabos—were just then deeply interested. True, there were always wheels within wheels, and in this case—Monsieur Perivale would comprehend? And, oh yes, they spoke English quite well.

Perivale, observing them closely, thought it quite possible that they spoke half a dozen other languages as well—since, taking a nearer view of them he had decided that it would be impossible to say, precisely, what nationality these men belonged to. They were cosmopolitan. And seeing what he had to deal with, he spoke freely.

'Your affair, gentlemen, seems to be very much mixed up with ours,' he observed. 'To put matters plainly, you have lost a sum of fifty thousand pounds, the property of your society. It is a great loss, and you are sure of your facts? You are sure that Auberge had this money on him when he left for England?'

There is no doubt of that,' replied the elder of the two, a grave, bearded man who wore spectacles, and looked like a college professor. 'Yes!'

'Let me ask you a few questions, gentlemen,' continued Perivale. 'This money was in notes of the Bank of England?'

'Fifty of such notes—in denomination of a thousand pounds each.'

'Did you take the precaution to make a memorandum of the numbers of the notes?'

'No! There were reasons.'

'Perhaps that does not matter. If I knew where you procured the notes—?'

The two men exchanged glances. It seemed to Perivale, watching them closely, that they could talk with their eyes, for the elder one almost immediately turned to him.

'They were procured for us, specially, by one of the great banks doing business with London. A special arrangement, you understand.'

‘The numbers will be there! It may be that it will be necessary for you, not for us, to get a memorandum of them. Well, gentlemen, you feel sure that Auberge had them on him when he reached England, and that he was murdered for them? That argues that somebody knew he was in possession of them. Don’t you suspect anybody?’

Once more the two men exchanged glances. This time the younger man replied.

‘No particular person. It may be that it was one of several persons who had knowledge of the commission entrusted to Auberge.’

‘In short, one of your society! A member perhaps, of your committee? That would simplify matters, for the numbers, I suppose, are limited. And it also argues, gentlemen, that you have had a traitor amongst you! Can you not put your finger on him?’

‘At present, no,’ replied the elder man. ‘Our object in seeing you is to learn if you can give us any information—in return for ours. In addition to the money which Auberge carried on him, he also carried, we are told, a particularly valuable diamond. That, like the money, is missing. Your task has been to find the diamond; ours is to recover our money—or, at any rate, to track and find the man who secured it! We think we may help you; we wish you to help us. For, monsieur, it seems to us that the man who stole your diamond from the dead body of Auberge stole our money at the same time. Who is he?’

‘I agree with you,’ said Perivale, ‘and I am going to tell you a story—Monsieur Pelabos here is already fully acquainted with it. It is a remarkable story, gentlemen, and you, probably, are the only people known to us who can answer certain questions arising out of it. Gentlemen! are you, both or either, acquainted with the town in England at which Auberge was murdered?’

‘I know Folkestone,’ replied the elder man promptly.

‘I have spent a month’s holiday there,’ said the other. ‘I know it!’

‘Very good—then you can follow me,’ continued Perivale, ‘Now, gentlemen, Auberge arrived at Folkestone about nine o’clock on Monday evening, October 23, and at half past seven next morning was found dead, murdered on a path beneath the Leas. I have recently ascertained that on that same Monday evening there came to a small private hotel on the Leas a man who, for reasons which he gave, wished to stay the night there. He did stay the night, and he left next morning at an unusually early hour—seven-thirty.

What did he do then? He chartered a passing taxicab, and, after making some inquiry of the driver, was taken in it to Newhaven, in time to catch the morning boat to Dieppe. Gentlemen; I have no doubt whatever that that man travelled from Paris to Folkestone on the Monday, and from Folkestone, by way of Newhaven and Dieppe, Paris, on the Tuesday—I also do not doubt that he was, in some way, connected with the murder of Auberge! Now—do you suggest anything?'

The elder man spoke—two words.

'Describe him!'

'As well as I can,' replied Perivale. 'A tall, well-built, somewhat portly man, middle-aged—inclining to elderly—English—quiet, reserved; in some company, taciturn. Evidently a man of means—well-dressed and so on. Looks like a well-to-do retired businessman, of a type familiar enough in Continental tourist resorts. Not a very noticeable type, perhaps—my description does not awaken any recollection in you?'

'It is a description of a very ordinary type! As you say, you could see many men of this sort—Englishmen—at any time at many places. Just an elderly Englishman—characteristically English!'

'Well, there is a fact about him which may assist,' said Perivale. 'I have said that this man was well dressed. He also wore extremely good jewellery, though it was limited in quantity and unobtrusive. But one who noted him carefully at the small private hotel I told you of noticed a very curious thing about him. Dependant from his solid gold watch-chain was a medal or charm—something of that sort—of common brass. An oval thing, in shape, having on it the figure of a sword, or dagger. Do you know anything of that, gentlemen?'

He was watching both men intently, hoping to catch some gleam of recognition in their faces. He caught nothing. The two faces remained as impassive as when Perivale first set eyes on them. But the elder man rose.

'I wish to consult with my colleague,' he said quietly. 'You will excuse us if we step aside, gentlemen?'

He moved to the middle of the room; the other man followed him; for a couple of minutes they stood whispering together. Then they returned and resumed their seats.

'Gentlemen,' said the elder man, looking from one detective to the other, 'you will continue to respect our confidence, I am sure! We are, after all, endeavouring, all four of us, to track down a particularly brutal murderer who

is also a thief. Well, gentlemen, the man Monsieur Perivale has described—we now know him! The description of the brass badge establishes his identity. He is—a traitor! In short, gentlemen, he is a man whom we had regarded as a particularly valuable and trusted member of our society, and who was one of the handful of men who knew that Auberge carried that money!' He paused for a second, glancing at his colleague. His glance slipped to the two detectives, and he spoke again, more quietly. 'We have been betrayed,' he said. 'Well, then, it is but one more instance.'

'The name of this man?' asked Perivale. 'In confidence!'

The elder man smiled, cynically.

'Doubtless he has many names,' he replied. 'We knew him as Summer—John Summer.'

'At the private hotel in Folkestone,' said Perivale, 'he called himself Winter! And we may as well be candid—Pelabos and myself know him, here in Paris, as Spring. He was a member of the syndicate which employed Auberge to negotiate the sale of the valuable diamond which has been mentioned. So he knew of two matters worth knowing!—one, that Auberge carried fifty thousand pounds in banknotes; the other, that he carried a diamond worth at least two-thirds of that amount! Fine booty! But now we know—and we must get him!'

The two men exchanged glances; the elder turned quietly to Perivale.

'I do not think that you need fatigue yourselves in that pursuit, gentlemen,' he said, in a particularly acid tone. 'You see—we, too, also know!'

'You mean that you know where we can lay hands on him?' asked Perivale eagerly. 'Ah! if you do—'

'I mean, monsieur,' interrupted the other, with more acidity, 'that we know how to deal with a traitor to our cause! We shall deal with this one!'

'Once—and for all!' murmured the other. 'Effectively!'

There was something so sinister in the utterances of both men that Perivale was at a loss for words; he saw Spring tried, condemned, executed in that last gently whispered phrase. He looked at Pelabos; Pelabos remained mute. The two men rose.

'We are deeply obliged, grateful to you, gentlemen, for the confidence with which you have treated us,' said the other. 'We shall respect yours! We will now—'

‘Wait a moment, if you please,’ interrupted Perivale. ‘I want to have a word with my excellent colleague here, if you will excuse us. Listen,’ he continued, leading Pelabos aside. ‘Do you think we should tell them that Auberge was also a traitor and a spy—those cypher papers, you know?’

‘At this stage, no!’ replied Pelabos. ‘Auberge is beyond their vengeance! No—I would let matters rest where they are, my friend—I flatter myself that we shall find Spring before they can lay hands on him! Yet there is one thing you might ask of them—do they know Ecks?’

‘Good!’ exclaimed Perivale… ’I will! I hadn’t thought of it. Gentlemen,’ he continued, going back to the others, ‘you have doubtless read of a man wanted in connection with the murder of Monsieur Auberge, who has been referred to in the papers as Mr Ecks? Now, you doubtless know, and have met many people—do you know him?’

‘We read the papers—you refer to the article translated from a London evening journal,’ replied the elder man. ‘We do not know Ecks as thus described—a poor description!—nor any man by that name. Can you describe this Ecks more fully?’

‘He has an imperfect finger, a brown mole on his left cheekbone, and his left arm is elaborately tattooed,’ said Perivale. ‘A tallish, loosely-built man—’

The elder man, for the first time, suddenly showed signs of perturbation. He had risen in the act to go; now he dropped back in his seat and began to talk hurriedly in some language which neither of the detectives understood, to his companion, who appeared: to be equally upset. After a minute or two of hasty talk, the elder man turned to the detectives, whispering:

‘Gentlemen,’ he said. ‘Tell me, I beg of you—was all that was set forth in the newspaper article about this man and his stay at the Royal Pavilion Hotel absolutely correct? There is no doubt that he was there—in Folkestone—on the night of the murder of Auberge?’

‘None!’ asserted Perivale. ‘None, whatever!’

‘Do you know anything—have you heard anything—anything at all!—that connects him while he was there with the other man who called himself Winter?’

‘Well, yes!’ said Perivale. ‘I believe him to be the man who was seen in conversation with Winter outside the private hotel on the night of the murder. But—you appear, now, to know something of him! Who is he?’

‘Another traitor,’ replied the elder man. ‘A travelling agent of our society! I see it—he and the man who calls himself sometimes Spring, sometimes Summer, sometimes Winter, have been in conspiracy. And you know this man as Mr Ecks! Ah! It is very good, that! X—the unknown quantity. Ah, well, gentlemen! We have learnt much this evening. And as for this last man—Ecks—do not trouble. You have done much to find him? ‘You cannot find him? Ah, messieurs, leave him, also, to us!’

With a look that made Perivale feel his blood turn cold, he bowed politely, and turned away.

23
The Midnight Visit

For a few minutes after their visitors had left them the two detectives sat silently staring at the door by which they had gone softly away. What had reduced them to silence was the sinister suggestiveness of the final remark. *Leave him, also, to us*! There had been something in the tone in which that admonition was given that made Perivale shiver a little. He glanced round at Pelabos. Pelabos nodded.

'Yes, my friend,' he said, sympathetically. 'I know what you are thinking. That we shall hear of Spring with his throat cut, and Ecks with his brains blown out! Well, my friend, it is not impossible! These people are, Perhaps, cleverer as human ferrets, than we are!'

'It certainly looks as if they could do our job for us, if they get the chance!' admitted Perivale. 'Or, rather, the hangman's job! But that won't suit me!'

'Why not, my friend?' asked Pelabos.

'I want to take the murderer of Auberge back to England,' replied Perivale, with a flash of his eye and a grim setting of his jaw. 'That's where he's wanted!'

Pelabos shrugged his shoulders.

'I should like to arrest Ecks, and also Spring,' he remarked. 'But if these people assassinated both, I should bow my head in assent and say merely that they had rid society of two pests! But clever as those men are who have just relieved us of their presence, they are not cleverer than either of the men we want. There is room—much room—for us, my friend! Courage! Tomorrow we will renew the campaign, refreshed, reinvigorated!'

Perivale said no more. Presently, when Pelabos had gone away, he went to bed, and, endeavouring to put everything out of his mind, tried to sleep. And he had just drifted into a first gentle slumber when a knock, hesitating and timid, sounded on the door of his bedroom. The next moment he had it open and was staring at a night porter, apologetic and doubtful, who, with

a single gesture, indicated a shadowy figure standing at the farther end of the corridor.

'Monsieur,' he whispered. 'There is a gentleman—he is persistent, monsieur, who desires to see you! Monsieur will pardon me, but—

Perivale nodded his comprehension, and took a step towards the man waiting in the distance. The man moved instinctively, and came under the light of an electric lamp. Budini!

'Tell the gentleman to come forward to my room,' said Perivale. He himself drew back, holding the door open, and Budini, interpreting the gesture, advanced swiftly and entered. The next instant he had turned on the detective.

'Monsieur Perivale,' he said in a trembling whisper, 'I come to you for shelter—for protection—for counsel! Monsieur, I am in terror of my life.'

Perivale motioned his visitor to a seat, and closed and bolted the door. Then he took a careful look at him. Budini was pale of hue and haggard of appearance; his eyes were those of a hunted thing; beads of perspiration were on his forehead, and beneath his dark moustache his lips were palpably quivering. And before saying a word the detective turned to his suitcase, and taking out a flask of brandy poured out and handed the frightened man a stiff drink of it.

'What is it?' he asked quietly. 'You're safe here, Mr Budini, anyway! And you can trust me.'

Budini swallowed the brandy with obvious relief. But the hand with which he set down the glass was still trembling when he turned to Perivale.

'You will pardon me?' he said. 'Coming at this time, in this way? But I knew you were here, and that I should be safe if I could see you. Mr Perivale, there is nowhere else in Paris where I should be safe tonight. I am—yes, afraid of even a shadow!'

'But—why?' asked Perivale. 'Here, smoke!—it will do you good. And as I said just now, you're safe here. Till morning, if you like. You perceive there are two beds in this room. Take one of them. But,' he continued, as he offered his visitor a cigarette, 'I want to know what the trouble is! Tell me! Of what are you afraid?—of whom are you afraid?'

Budini took the cigarette, and, after smoking a minute in silence, heaved a deep sigh and shook his head.

'I scarcely know,' he answered. 'Murder, I think! And—of the man you know as Spring! All today, since hearing of what befell Delardier last night,

I have gone about, here, there, anywhere, dreading what might happen to me at any minute. Ah! You do not know!'

'But I want to know!' exclaimed Perivale. 'That's just what I do want! Can't you tell me, clearly, plainly?'

Budini remained silent a moment longer, evidently collecting his thoughts.

'It began last night,' he said suddenly. 'Last night—and since then, at least since an early hour this morning, I have lived in a nightmare, not knowing, you comprehend, if I should be the next. That murder of Delardier, you know? If Delardier, why not me? Because—we were in a secret.'

What secret?' asked Perivale.

'I will try to explain. But pardon me if I seem—confused, eh? It is difficult to get things clear. Well, it is like this. Last night I was in a café which I visit regularly, near the Boulevard de Clichy, when Delardier came there—he knew where to find me. He was much upset, agitated. He told me that he had had a conversation with you and Pelabos, in the course of which it had been told to him that Spring, the other member of our syndicate, had been in Folkestone on the night of the murder of Auberge, and that certain facts, now come to light, indicated that Spring had entered into a conspiracy with the man Ecks to murder Auberge and steal the diamond. If that were true, then, of course, Spring was deceiving us, and Delardier and I would lose the money we had invested in the diamond. There were other matters—something about money which had been entrusted to Auberge for some special purpose and was now missing. That we did not trouble about—it was not our affair; ours was the diamond. And we desired to see Spring at once!'

Budini paused, shaking his head as if at some recollection. He was smoking his cigarette quickly and threw it away and lighted another before he went on; the mere mention of Spring's name appeared to unnerve him.

'We knew where Spring might be found at that hour,' he said at last. 'We found him! The thought of him affects me!—his—ah, I do not know what it is!—his atmosphere of—something I cannot define! But—we found him, at a certain café near the Rue Royale—I can indicate it to you. Delardier talked to him, diplomatically at first, plainly in the end. He told him that he had heard that he was in Folkestone on the night of Auberge's murder, and invited an answer to the question—was he? Was it true?'

'And what did Spring say?' inquired Perivale.

‘He insisted on knowing the source of Delardier’s information,’ replied Budini.

‘Did Delardier give it?’

‘On pressure—yes!’

‘As being—what?’

‘Yourself! Delardier told him—I felt he was telling too much, but Delardier was becoming excited—he told him that you had found out this, that you were here in Paris, primed with this knowledge, and that you had with you a young gentleman, who could identify him as the man who had stayed at a small private hotel in Folkestone that particular night under the name of Winter.’

‘Then Delardier really put Spring in possession of all the facts against him?’ suggested Perivale.

‘Yes—as far as I am aware. He seemed to tell Spring all that you and Pelabos had told him. I would have checked Delardier, but it was useless. He was painfully anxious about the diamond.’

‘Did he mention—I mean did Delardier mention—the man named Ecks?’

‘Yes—he told Spring that he was suspected of being in league with Ecks to obtain possession of the diamond and the money entrusted to Auberge.’

‘In short, Delardier gave everything away? A mistake! But you have not told me what Spring said in answer?’

‘He said nothing until he had heard everything! Then he became, or assumed an appearance of being, absolutely indifferent! He said that Delardier’s story was quite correct as regards one fact. He was in Folkestone on the night in question.’

‘He admitted that?’

‘Freely. He made no difficulty. He said that he had an interest—a financial interest—in some property at Folkestone, which had belonged to his family for many generations, and that early in the morning of the day he went there he received a telegram from the agent who deals with that property, asking him to go over at once to see him in respect of some transaction relating to it. And in proof of that he there and then produced from his pocketbook and showed to me and Delardier the telegram he spoke of, which he had preserved.’

‘You saw it?’

‘I saw it, handled it, read it! It said “Desirable that you should see me personally at once concerning matter in hand.” Oh yes, it was genuine—I

noted the postmark and the date.'

And he claimed to have gone over because of that telegram?'

'Certainly! All the rest, he said, was mere coincidence. He went at once to Folkestone; saw his agent, who, he added, was the man he was seen talking to outside the little hotel on the Leas; spent the night there, and next morning hastened back to Paris by way of Newhaven and Dieppe.'

'And—Ecks? Did he disclaim all knowledge of him?'

'Absolutely, and of anything relating to Auberge, the murder, the theft of the diamond, the theft of the money—of everything!'

'You believed him?'

'I did not know what to think—then! But I remembered something that seemed to be in his favour. When he, Delardier, and I were in Folkestone, at the Royal Pavilion Hotel, after hearing of the murder, Spring, one morning, excused himself to us, saying that he had some property in that town, and wished to see the man who managed his interests there. That, of course, seemed to indicate that he was telling the truth.'

'But Delardier? Did he believe him?'

Budini shook his head in a decided negative.

'He did not! Delardier was excited—furious about the diamond. He let Spring see that he still doubted him. He demanded more proof of Spring's innocence. Spring became cold—reserved—much too polite. I have heard it said—I do not know if it is true—that one should beware of an Englishman, if, in a difference of opinion, or in a quarrel, he grows icily polite! Spring was like that! But Delardier grew more insistent. Monsieur Perivale, he has paid for it. Within an hour or two, Delardier was dead.'

'You think Spring murdered him?'

Budini shivered as he spread out his hands. He gave the detective an odd glance.

'Monsieur Perivale, I have ascertained certain facts about the murder of Delardier. He was killed in precisely the same way in which Auberge was killed—by one swift, carefully delivered thrust through the back; a thrust of some exceedingly powerful and sharp weapon that penetrated the heart. And now—now I think Spring was at Folkestone in pursuance of certain designs against Auberge; designs made in concert with Ecks. I think that one of those two, Ecks or Spring, and most probably Ecks, murdered Auberge. But of this I am sure, whoever it was that murdered Auberge mur-

dered Delardier last night. And—I am not safe, monsieur—I know what Delardier knew!'

'You are safe here, Monsieur Budini,' said Perivale. 'And tomorrow—well, we shall see that you are equally safe. But, as you have known him so very intimately, can't you give us some help in finding Spring? You know his habits, of course?'

'Not to the extent you think probable,' replied Budini. 'I have had one or two business dealings with him, but he has been to me, always, a man of more or less mystery. A man of little speech, of great reserve—you Englishmen, Monsieur Perivale, are noted for your quality of reserve, but Spring is more reserved than any other Englishman I have known or met. He is a silent, watchful man—the sort that listens and says few words.'

'And—clever?' suggested the detective.

'Ah!' exclaimed Budini. 'It is as if you should ask—is the devil clever? Oh yes, then, clever—and unscrupulous!'

'You believe now, that Spring is in possession of that diamond?'

'Of the diamond, and of the money Delardier and I heard of, but which did not concern us. Oh yes. He, or he and Ecks between them. This Ecks, then—whoever he may be—he has not yet been traced?'

'Not yet,' replied Perivale. 'But the police here are doing all they can.'

Budini shook his head doubtfully.

'Ah!' he said. 'I think it will be found that Ecks has gone, with the diamond and the money, and that by this time Spring has followed him. Yet—I am in terror at this minute that Spring should break in on us here, now! There is something about him that turns my blood to ice, monsieur, and that gives me—'

'Think no more of that tonight,' interrupted Perivale. 'Sleep in that bed—confidently. In the morning—'

But ere the morning came, and while Budini was still sleeping in his corner of the room, Perivale was roused by a knock at the door—the sort of knock which indicates business that may not be put off. He responded to it instantly, to find the night porter, who had brought Budini to the room there again; this time with an official-looking envelope.

'From Monsieur Pelabos, to be delivered to monsieur immediately,' he announced. 'It came but a moment ago.'

Perivale tore open the envelope, and extracted a single sheet of paper on which a few words had been hastily scribbled in handwriting that he knew

to be that of Pelabos: —

Come here to me at once: I have found him!

24
What Bougaud Saw

The indefinite nature of this communication caused Perivale to read it over two or three times. Found—him? But—who was it that Pelabos had found? Spring? Ecks? Somebody, anyway. He turned to the waiting porter.

'Who brought this?' he asked sharply.

'A gendarme, monsieur,' replied the porter. 'He waits below.'

'Bring him here, quickly,' said Perivale. 'And—you understand—quietly!'

The man bowed his comprehension, and went off, and Perivale, closing the door, hurried on the necessary clothing. Budini still slept; he showed no sign of waking when a second knock came. But this time Perivale went outside the room. There, in the corridor stood the porter and the gendarme—the gendarme stolid and official in contrast to the porter's evident curiosity.

'You can go,' said Perivale to the porter. 'I rely on your discretion, you understand?'

He turned to the gendarme.

'Monsieur Pelabos sent this?' he suggested, producing the note. 'Where is he?'

'At the Prefecture de Police, monsieur.'

'He speaks here of having found somebody. Who is it?'

'That I do not know, monsieur! The letter was handed to me with instructions to hasten immediately with it to monsieur's hotel. But! learned that there had been an affray near the Prefecture—an attack on some man, and that the man had been brought in there. An attempted assassination, I understood, monsieur.'

'You did not see the man?'

'I saw nothing, monsieur.'

'Go downstairs,' said Perivale. 'Get a cab—wait for me.'

As the gendarme went off along the silent corridor, Perivale turned back into his room and gently waking Budini bade him secure himself until his

return. Then he hurried off to the rooms of Cripstone and Lawson, and, bidding them dress and follow him to the Prefecture as quickly as possible, ran down to the entrance hall and joined the gendarme, who, by that time, had secured a vehicle. He glanced at his watch as they drove off. Half-past five o'clock.

'At what hour did this affair happen' he asked his companion.

'I was informed—but monsieur understands that I know scarcely anything—at four o'clock this morning,' replied the gendarme. 'An affray in the street—in the neighbourhood of the Prefecture. The man—that is to say, a badly wounded man, was carried in there. Something—I do not know what—induced the police to send for Monsieur Pelabos; Monsieur Pelabos, on arriving and after seeing the man, sent for Monsieur.'

It must be Spring, thought Perivale—it must, at any rate, be either Spring or Ecks. He was impatient to know; he wished the cab would move more quickly. Then a sudden anxiety came over him.

'You say the man was wounded?' he asked.

'Did you ascertain—how seriously?'

'I heard nothing as to that, monsieur. Wounded! That was all I heard. Except—ah, yes, monsieur, I recollect this. Stabbed! A case of the knife, monsieur comprehends.'

Stabbed! Auberge had been stabbed—Delardier had been stabbed! Was this—but it was idle to speculate. He sat, excited and impatient until the cab set him and his companion down at the Prefecture, where he followed the gendarme through corridors and passages to a small, ill-lighted room in which he found Pelabos, eagerly conversing with two or three more or less sleepy-looking officials. Pelabos detached himself. The eagerness faded from his face, however, as he turned to Perivale, and the shake of his head was mournful and expressive of intense disappointment.

'My friend!' he said solemnly, 'I had believed we had come to the great opportunity, and it has escaped us. He is dead!'

'Who is dead?' demanded Perivale. 'Of whom are you talking?'

Pelabos stared incredulously.

'Of whom? Of Ecks!' he exclaimed. 'My hurried message to you? Did I not say the name? Ah, I was so excited! But Ecks! Yes! And—gone! And, my friend, without a word! He never regained consciousness.'

Perivale heaved a sigh of disappointment. He had been reckoning on the possibilities of the wounded man being Ecks. An admission, a confession,

a statement…

'I want to know!' he said. 'The messenger you sent to the hotel could tell me nothing, but that there had been an affray. What happened?—how came Ecks in this neighbourhood? Why should he be near the Prefecture?'

'That is just what I should like to know myself,' exclaimed Pelabos. 'And it is, perhaps, what we shall never know, though I have already indulged in theories. What would appear to be a reasonable theory, for example—'

'Pardon!' interrupted Perivale, with characteristic British impatience. 'I'm not in the theorising mood! I want to know facts. What did happen?'

'My friend, there is but one person in the world—other than the criminal himself—who can give first-hand testimony as to what happened,' replied Pelabos. 'And as he has just departed, after having had his testimony taken down, I can only repeat it to you—or, better, read his statement to you. You will then know as much as I do—and I am desolated that we know no more.' He turned to an official who was busy at a desk, and, after a moment's parley with him, came back to Perivale with a document, which, after bidding him to attend closely, he proceeded to read.

> 'My name is Louis Jean Bougaud. I am aged 47. I am a night watchman employed at the warehouse of Crendolière Frères on the Quai St Michel. I reside in the St Lazare district. As regards this particular night, I arranged, my wife being ill, that a friend of mine should, my employer being agreeable, relieve me of my duties at four o'clock in the morning. My friend arrived at the warehouse at twenty minutes before that hour. I left it in his charge at ten minutes to four and set out on my way—that is by the Pont St Michel and so northward to the Boulevard de Strasbourg. This, of course, took me past the Prefecture of Police. I had just crossed the Pont St Michel, and was approaching the Prefecture when I heard, across the street, a scream which froze the blood of my veins. It was one cry—a fearful one! At the same instant, as it seemed, I heard a fall, a crash. It was a dark morning; the lamps threw little light. But I then saw a man, a tall, and I think, a heavily-built man, running away with what appeared to me to be incredible speed along the Quai des Orfévres, in the direction of the Pont Neuf. He ran so rapidly that in a second or two he was gone—I think he may

have turned into the Place Dauphin, or, perhaps concealed himself. All then was silent. I hastened across the space to the corners of the Prefecture; it was thence, it seemed to me, that the scream had come. I there found a man stretched across the pavement. He was moaning very faintly, and when I touched his shoulder he made no response. I then hurried to the Prefecture and having succeeded in gaining attention at a side entrance, informed the officials of what I had seen and heard. They accompanied me to the place at which the man lay, and he was removed within the building. I cannot describe the man who disappeared further. All I can positively assert is that in the uncertain light he seemed to be a very tall, heavily-built man, and that, considering his size,.I was amazed at the extraordinary swiftness with which he ran away-from the scene of his crime.'

'That is all that Louis Jean Bougaud can tell,' concluded Pelabos. 'I resume from the point at which he finishes. The wounded man was brought in here, and the doctor summoned. My friend, the man had been run through the back! Precisely as Auberge was, and as Delardier was! But—with a difference. In those two cases, the work had been done more cleanly—they, presumably, had died almost instantaneously. But in this—perhaps a sudden movement on the part of the victim, perhaps a slight miscalculation on the part of the assassin—at any rate, while Delardier and Auberge died, we believe, at once, this man, Ecks, lingered for an hour!'

'Look here,' said Perivale, 'are you sure this man is Ecks?'

'I shall be greatly astonished if he is not,' exclaimed Pelabos. 'You will remember, my friend, that our police here—and indeed all over France!—have been furnished with the description of Ecks supplied by yourself, and your excellent colleague, the amiable Cripstone? Well, then, our officials here, when this man was carried in, recognised him from those descriptions. But to make sure, they sent for me, Pelabos! And I—I have no doubt. You shall see for yourself—come with me!'

'Wait!' said Perivale. 'Cripstone will be here in a few minutes. I want to know if Ecks—if it is the man who presented himself at Folkestone as Ecks—is the man Cripstone knew. But now—the man whom Bougaud saw running away? That, of course, is Spring!'

‘Naturally, my friend, it is Spring! Ah, if Bougaud had but resembled him in the faculty of swiftness! But Bougaud, you must be informed, is a heavily-built, fleshy fellow, inclined to corpulence—Bougaud could not run after a snail! And so—Spring is at large. Still—courage! We shall have him!’

‘I wish to heaven we’d got him,’ growled Perivale. ‘But—why were these men in the neighbourhood of the Prefecture at that hour of the moming?’

Pelabos smiled knowingly, and wagged a forefinger.

‘Ah-ah!’ he said. ‘Why?’ But I—Pelabos!—I have a theory. Spring feared that Ecks was about to betray him! He knew that Ecks would approach the authorities under cover of the night—he watched him, tracked him! Yes, my friend, you smile at my theory, but theory—.

Cripstone, explaining that Lawson would follow, came hurrying in just then, and at Pelabos’s suggestion accompanied him and Perivale to see the dead man’s body. It lay where it had been temporarily placed while awaiting removal, and Perivale gazed on it with curiosity, mingled with wonder. But Cripstone went straight to the point.

‘This is the man I knew,’ he said, almost instantly. ‘There are the tattoo marks! Oh yes—there’s no doubt about it. And there,’ he added, turning to Perivale, ‘there are the marks we heard of from the young lady and the porter at the Folkestone hotel—the mutilated finger and the brown mole on the left cheek. That’s the man! Well—’ he paused, glancing inquiringly at his companions. ‘Tell anything before the end came?’ he asked.

Perivale shook his head dismally.

‘Never recovered consciousness, so Pelabos tells me,’ he answered. ‘Dying when they brought him in here! No—not a word!’

‘How was it?’ asked Cripstone. ‘Murder?’

‘Precisely same thing that happened to Auberge and to Delardier,’ replied Perivale. ‘Run through the heart from behind. In this case, he lingered awhile—longer than they did, anyway.’ He paused, looking thoughtfully at the dead man. ‘There’s a feature of these cases that I’d like to know more about,’ he said presently. ‘Of minor importance, perhaps—but I’d just like to know, to have it solved, you understand.’

‘What’s that?’ asked Cripstone.

‘Perhaps a mere bit of inquisitiveness on my part,’ replied Perivale. ‘But just this—what weapon did this man use? According to the doctors who examined Auberge, and those who saw Delardier it’s a weapon of ex-

traordinary fineness. The wound in each of those cases was precisely similar, from what the medical man in Folkestone and here in Paris told me—caused, they said, by a rapier or stiletto having thin edges, each of which was ground to the keenness of a first-class razor. A terrible weapon in the hand of a man determined on killing! But—how did he carry it?'

Neither Pelabos nor Cripstone could offer any solution to that question. They were all three retiring from the room when Lawson came in. At his first glance at the dead man, he started, letting out a hushed exclamation.

'By Jove,' he said in an awed whisper, 'I saw that man last night!'

The others turned sharply on him.

'Where?' demanded Perivale.

'In a small, obscure café—one of the poorer sort—in the Montmartre district,' replied Lawson. 'I can't remember its name, but I can take you to it. I was dodging about that part, don't you know, in and out of lots of places, looking for Winter. I distinctly remember this man, his clothes, hat, everything! He sat near me, in conversation with an old man who had a grey beard, an unusually long grey beard, and a hunched back—or perhaps he was very much bent with age. There's no doubt about it! I remember this man, but I never suspected he was Ecks, of course.'

'But look here!' exclaimed Perivale. 'You'd heard the description of Ecks! How was it you didn't recognise that brown mole on his left cheek?'

I never saw his left cheek!' replied Lawson. 'He sat at a table not far from mine, on the same side of the café, with his right side to me. He never turned his full face in my direction. And I wasn't there so long—I'd merely poked my nose in to see—well, what I could see! But that is the man—I particularly noted those clothes and the cloth deer-stalker both as being somewhat old-fashioned and anything but Parisian. I took him and his companion for a couple of artists—as a matter of fact they were examining some pictures—watercolours, I think—which this man had in a small portfolio.'

Perivale looked at his two detective companions.

'Let us get out of this!' he said, moving towards the door. 'Mr Lawson will give us a fuller description of the old man who was with Ecks at this café. Because I think that that old man is Spring, alias Winter!'

25
WHERE?

This declaration on the part of Perivale caused Cripstone to turn on him with an incredulous smile and shake of the head.

'Surely not!' he exclaimed. 'Come, now! From what you told me, Mr Lawson here is thoroughly acquainted with Spring, or, as he called himself at Folkestone, Winter! Therefore, Spring would recognise him last night. And he'd have been a clever actor indeed if he didn't show some sign of it which Mr Lawson could hardly fail to perceive, unless he's singularly unobservant—which,' he added, with a sly smile at Lawson, 'he isn't—in my opinion.'

'I feel confident the old man was not Spring,' said Lawson. 'I can't believe that any man could possibly disguise himself so effectually. He was a thoroughly patriarchal-looking old chap—a long grey beard which covered most of his face, right up to his cheek bones, much wrinkled about his eyes, and with longish hair greyer than his beard. Genuine enough, in my opinion! It never crossed my mind for a second that he might be Spring. Besides, if he wasn't a hunchback, he was so bowed with age that he looked like one.'

'You said he was a tall man,' remarked Perivale. 'Whoever saw a tall hunchback?'

'Then it was age,' asserted Lawson. 'He was a very, very old man!'

Perivale gave Lawson an indulgent smile.

'Did you look at his hands?' he asked.

'No—can't say that I did,' replied Lawson.

'Why?'

'Next time you're looking at a man—under similar circumstances—look at his hands,' said Perivale. 'You'll soon tell if he's really old, or elderly, or middle-aged, or young! I'm still of opinion that this old man was Spring, alias Winter, alias Summer! Anyhow, he was with Ecks. Therefore, he will

know something about Ecks. Accordingly, we must find him, Probably he is a regular customer at that café. You can find the café again?'

'I can find it again, certainly,' replied Lawson. 'It had a name—usual sort of thing in that quarter—but I can't remember it. Still, I can go to it.'

'Tonight, then,' said Perivale. 'We must arrange a careful visit… What time was it when you were in there last night?'

'At about nine o'clock—from that to half-past, anyway.'

'The same time tonight, then,' repeated Perivale. 'It is, at any rate, a chance.' He turned to Pelabos. 'We can arrange matters?'

Pelabos showed no signs of belief in the proposed arrangement. He inclined his head towards the room they had just left.

'The news of that will be spread before the morning is much older!' he remarked, 'It cannot be kept back. And Spring will hear it, and if—which I, too, greatly doubt—the old man described by Monsieur Lawson really is Spring, then Spring will not be seen at that café, my friend.'

'You're forgetting that Spring may feel absolutely safe in his make-up as a time-worn patriarch,' said Perivale. 'I shall try the café anyhow.'

He went back to the hotel after that, and to Budini. The Italian stared questioningly at him as Perivale closed the door and went to the side of his bed.

'Budini,' said Perivale, 'there has been another murder! This time—Ecks! It is getting wholesale. We shall have to get that man, somehow. Now listen!'

Budini listened as if fascinated. He grew pale under his olive skin.

'It is as I told you,' he muttered, 'he will stop at nothing! Whoever knows his secret is not safe! But—yes, there may be some safety now! I do not know, though, if there is safety for me—I know!'

'He must know that there are others than you who know his secret,' said Perivale. 'But come! Let us be practical. Do you know anything of this café that Lawson speaks of—I mean as being a resort of Spring's?'

'Nothing! But then I don't know how it is called. Still I never knew Spring to frequent any of the places in Montmartre.'

'Precisely why he should frequent them now,' remarked Perivale. 'But I am amazed that he remains here in Paris at all! Why doesn't he clear out with his spoils?'

'Because, in all probability, he never got hold of the spoils, at any rate of the diamond, until during this last night,' replied Budini. 'And the diamond

is, of course, the most easily realisable property. As far as I am aware, it is not easy to get rid—I mean, to convert into more convenient form—your Bank of England notes of a thousand pounds each. But a diamond—ah, that is another matter!'

'And you think that Ecks got and held the diamond until last night?' suggested Perivale.

'I should say so—if your suspicion that the old man of the café is Spring is correct,' replied Budini. 'Still, it is a mystery—and there is a conclusion, monsieur, to which with due respect to your superior knowledge, I think you have jumped rather hastily!'

'Yes, what?' demanded Perivale. 'Tell me, plainly.'

'I do not feel at all certain that the man who knifed Ecks and who was seen by the nightwatchman, Bougaud, to run away with such extraordinary swiftness really was Spring,' replied Budini. 'To my thinking that does not at all follow! The old man with the grey beard may have been Spring, made up, disguised, but I do not see that the man seen by Bougaud was Spring!'

'Can you think of any other person that it might have been, then?' asked the detective.

Budini made a significant gesture.

'According to what Delardier, poor fellow, told me when he sought me that night,' he said, 'the officials of some secret society were as anxious to find Ecks as they were resolved on finding Spring! Ecks, like Spring, was a traitor—a double-dealing person. And those secret societies! Ah, I know them and how they work and what they can do. This affair of Ecks may have been what the society in question would call an execution of justice! Do you not see?'

'I think it was the same hand that struck down Auberge at Folkestone, and Delardier here in Paris,' replied Perivale. 'The wounds in all three cases appear to have been caused by the same weapon—an unusual weapon, I should say.'

'I think you will find that this secret society is at work,' said Budini. 'Such people, if betrayed or deceived, are implacable!'

Perivale said no more. Remarking that they would have their coffee brought up there, he rang the bell, and after giving his order, turned to his toilet preparations. But he was thinking. He had not forgotten the last words of the secret society official on quitting Pelabos and himself; the words that applied to Ecks.

'Leave him, also, to us, monsieur!—leave him, also, to us!'

Had these people wreaked their vengeance on Ecks? Was the big man that Bougaud saw running away so swiftly, not Spring, but some emissary of the society? And was some equally determined and vengeful agent tracking and dogging Spring? If so, and Spring knew of it, or guessed it, would not that knowledge or suspicion cause Spring to live the life of a mole, until he could emerge from beneath the surface and get a chance of escape?

But that was all conjecture; the practical thing was to do something. During the whole of that day the police, under direction of Pelabos, were unusually busy and pertinacious, but when night fell Spring had not materialised, nor had any further information come to hand regarding him or Ecks. Nobody came forward: with particulars as to the murdered man; it was a puzzle as to where Ecks had lived, where he had hid himself during the time that had elapsed between his arrival in Paris from Boulogne, and his murder outside the Prefecture. And when nine o'clock came that evening Perivale, in company with his two English companions, Pelabos, and a couple of French detectives, repaired to the café Lawson had spoken of, feeling that if something did not eventuate there the search for Spring was destined to be more difficult than ever.

Something had already eventuated before they reached the place to which Lawson conducted them. The street was a short and narrow one; halfway down its length an excited crowd was gathered, talking, vociferating, gesticulating. It was a crowd of civilians, old and young, but here and there was a uniform; over everything, from the people staring out of upper windows to those on the pavements was an air of mystery. And in the doorway of a small café stood its proprietor, his hands busy, his shoulders eloquent, haranguing two or three policemen, one of whom wrote in a notebook.

'That's the place!' exclaimed Lawson. The Café de la Loup Gris! That's its boss at the door—I remember him. But what's the row?'

Pelabos murmured an admonition to follow him closely, and pushing his way through the crowd, advanced to the group at the door with an air of unmistakable authority. The policemen recognised him and fell back, resigning their job into his superior hands, and Pelabos motioned the excited proprietor to retire within his establishment.

'Let us go inside, my friend!' he said gently. 'You shall narrate to us what has happened. Speak freely, then—you perceive that I am in authority. What, then, makes itself here? An outrage?'

The proprietor drew his shoulders up to his ears, and spread both hands wide.

'An outrage of the most abominable, monsieur!' he exclaimed. 'Incredible! Shameful! And in my establishment, too, the prevalent tone and atmosphere of which, as all who know it will testify, is of the highest respectability!—a temple of the muses, monsieur, by which I would convey to monsieur that it is the resort of those who practise the arts! Oh yes, indeed, an outrage such as I would not have conceived it possible I could ever witness beneath this so-peaceful roof! Ah, monsieur, I rage, I tremble at present, but I could weep—'

'Doubtless!' interrupted Pelabos. 'But one weeps at leisure; at present the thing is to be stern! This outrage, then?'

'Monsieur shall be told the story,' answered the proprietor, making a determined effort to nerve himself. 'Monsieur shall judge for himself! Figure to yourself, then, monsieur, the peaceful atmosphere of my establishment at the hour of nine—or a little earlier—this evening. Not many patrons present, monsieur—a few, well known to me. Amongst them an old one—a venerable whose grey hairs should have been his protection! He has dined, monsieur—a delicate taste is his, in food and wine—and now he sits, calm, benign, peaceful, enjoying his coffee, his *petit verre*, his cigarette—it makes good the heart to behold him in the winter of his days, taking his ease after the exquisite refection which his own taste and the skill of my accomplished chef—a *cordon bleu*, did monsieur but know it!—has caused to be served to him. But then, monsieur, truly a thunderbolt! The door of my establishment is suddenly and indecently thrust open, flung wide! To my horror and that of my patrons there rushes in a posse of men—all of whom, monsieur, wear masks of black cloth across the upper part of their faces, which are, doubtless, of the most villainous. Without a word, monsieur, they leap upon and seize my venerable patron; they pinion him by the arm, the leg; they offer him unbelievable indignities; they force, bear, carry, thrust him out of the door; they fling him into a car, a capacious car, which is without; some fling themselves after him, some leap upon the car—they are off, monsieur, as swiftly as they arrive, their unfortunate victim at their mercy. And we others, we are stupefied, we gasp, we tremble, we gaze at one another, horror-stricken! We ask ourselves if we dream, if it is real, if we live in an age of civilisation, if—'

‘It is indeed an outrage worthy the times of the Huns,’ agreed Pelabos. ‘But we will steel ourselves once more! This elderly gentleman—he is a regular patron of yours?’

‘Since some little time ago, monsieur.’

‘And his name?’

‘Ah, monsieur, I cannot tell you! Yet it runs in my poor head that I have heard him called Monsieur Blanc.’

‘Do you know where he lives?’

‘No, monsieur, I do not know that. It is perhaps, a period of two, or three months, since he began to patronise my establishment. I gathered—one keeps one’s eyes open, monsieur, and, to a certain extent, one’s ears—that he was a patron of the arts. I have here, monsieur, a small clientele of young artists—those, monsieur comprehends, who have not yet arrived, who are, as it were, climbing the hill. This good old gentleman bought many sketches, pictures, from these promising young men; he was, evidently, one of those who carry money in the purse—ah, yes, a well-provided one, without doubt! Generous, too, I am assured—which makes this outrage all the more abominable, as monsieur will admit.’

‘I admit it freely,’ agreed Pelabos. ‘An outrage of the most reprehensible. But this gang of miscreants—in which direction did their car proceed?’

But the proprietor did not know. Nor could any of the people in the street tell more than that the car, driven away at a high speed, turned the first corner and disappeared immediately.

‘An affair of a moment, monsieur comprehends?’ said a man outside who had witnessed the occurrence. ‘From the inception to the development, monsieur, an affair of seconds—literally!’

Pelabos and his companions went away; Pelabos drew Perivale aside when they were once outside the narrow street.

‘We may draw our own conclusions about this, my friend,’ he whispered. ‘Spring is in the hands of the society we know of! Well, then, we shall never know what has happened to him! But he had better have entered the lair of a tiger!’

‘I agree,’ said Perivale.

He went back to his hotel, and eventually to his room, feeling that Spring was now out of his reach. But he had removed no more than his coat when a porter appeared at the door and handed to him a crumpled, much-folded scrap of paper.

26

JUSTICE

The porter turned away as he placed the note in Perivale's hand, signifying thereby that no answer was expected. But the detective had noticed a look on his face which suggested mystery, and he hastened to call him back.

'Who gave you this?' he asked. 'And when?'

'But a moment ago, monsieur—as one would say. He was—yes, one of those two persons with whom monsieur was in conversation the other evening. Monsieur will recollect?'

'Where is he? Waiting?'

'No, monsieur. He did but enter, with a request that this should be brought to monsieur at once, and then retired.'

Perivale nodded, and as the man went away, turned back into his room, and, before untwisting the folded note, the outer flap of which was secured by a wafer, glanced at his watch. Half an hour after midnight!—a strange time to receive any communication! But this—what was it? Standing beneath the electric light, he unfolded the scrap of paper and read a line, evidently written hastily, in pencil.

> 'Monsieur Perivale, I await you outside the hotel at the left-hand corner.'

Perivale wasted no time in hesitation. Tearing the crumpled paper into fragments, and slipping his revolver into his hip-pocket, he left the room forthwith, and hurrying downstairs passed out into the street and turned to the left. There, at the corner indicated he saw a man waiting, and, advancing quickly towards him, recognised him at once as the elder of the two secret society men who had conversed with him and Pelabos; he saw, too, that his visitor was alone.

'You sent for me, monsieur,' he said quietly, as he walked up. 'I am here!'

The man made a polite bow.

'A thousand apologies for intruding on you at this hour, monsieur!' he answered. 'But I feel assured that you will pardon me when I tell you that it is my desire, and the desire of those whom I represent to place you in possession of certain information. I lay stress on that word you, Monsieur Perivale! What I propose to tell you is for your private information, for your ears only. It is not for Pelabos! It is for you, representing the English police. You are an honourable man—you will respect my confidence? Very well, then, monsieur, you are, I know—for we are people who know everything about anything that concerns our affairs—you are acquainted with a certain event which took place at the Café de la Loup Gris some few hours ago? Precisely! And you would like to know what followed upon it, as far as the captured man was concerned?'

'I should certainly like to know that,' replied Perivale. 'You will tell me?'

'I am here to tell you everything, Monsieur Perivale—in strict confidence and privacy! Walk with me a little in this direction—there is a café I know of close by, where we can converse; a safe place, too. Indeed, all is safe—I shall discharge my task of telling you what I have to tell, and then—well, monsieur, you can then return to England, satisfied!'

There was a strange tone of finality in that last word that made Perivale experience once more the curious sensation of ice-cold shivering that had come over him once before in this man's company. But he made no remark, and followed his companion along the street to a café wherein there were still many customers, His guide sought out a quiet corner, and bade a somewhat sleepy waiter bring coffee. Not until they had been left to themselves did he speak again. Then he turned to the detective with a meaning smile.

'Monsieur Perivale, from what I have seen of you,' he said, 'you are not a slow one—you can put together two and two as well as another!'

'I hope so,' replied Perivale. 'And that means—eh?'

'That you guessed that the venerable man who was seized at the Loup Gris this evening was the person you knew as Spring, alias Winter?'

'To be plain, I did guess that!'

'You guessed rightly, monsieur! And you doubtless guessed further that the persons who arrested Spring and carried him away, successfully, were officials of the society which I represent?'

'I guessed that, too! But I don't think there was much guessing about it! I felt sure of it. Just as sure as I feel sure of something now!'

'And what is that, Monsieur Perivale?'

'Why, that you've got Spring in safe keeping! Just that!'

The man smiled enigmatically.

'Spring is now certainly in safe keeping, monsieur, but not in our keeping!' He leaned nearer to Perivale's side and lowered his voice to a whisper. 'Monsieur, I came to tell you the truth! You need not search for Spring any longer! He is dead!'

Perivale started, in spite of a determination to keep cool. He twisted sharply round on his companion with a questioning stare. But the man, who was calmly rolling a cigarette, only nodded, nonchalantly, and repeated his last word.

'Dead!' he said. 'In fine—executed!'

Perivale's mouth suddenly felt curiously dry: He gulped once or twice. Then he caught sight of his coffee and reached for it. But he saw his own fingers trembling, and the coffee shook in the cup as he lifted it.

'Good God!' he exclaimed. 'You don't mean that—'

'I mean that the man was a traitor, and that after due trial he was put to a traitor's death, Monsieur Perivale! He was shot through the heart a few minutes later—and by this time he is safely buried!'

Perivale relapsed into silence. He had the feelings of a man who suddenly realises that he is confronted with a secret power working in darkness. His companion evidently gauged his feelings and nodded sympathetically.

'You do not understand, monsieur!' he said. 'You, with your official training, your cut-and-dried methods, you would call what I have just spoken of by an ugly name—murder! No—it is not even judicial murder. It is—justice! The man was a human tiger—he died red with blood!'

'You had something to tell me?' said Perivale.

'And I shall proceed to tell it!' replied the other. 'Well, then, convinced, after the conversation which took place between Pelabos and yourself and my colleague and myself, that the man Spring was a traitor and a spy, and probably guilty of the murder of Auberge and the theft of our money and of the diamond at Folkestone, and of the subsequent murder of Delardier here, we used all our energies as a society to track him; we also expended our energy in tracing the man Ecks, whom we suspected as being Spring's accomplice. In this—'

'Pardon!' interrupted Perivale. 'A question! You know, of course, that Ecks was murdered near the Prefecture some twenty-four hours ago?'

‘We know, of course! There is nothing, Monsieur Perivale, that we do not know in connection with this affair!’

‘Well—who murdered Ecks?’ asked Perivale, bluntly.

‘Spring! Because he had discovered that Ecks was about to—what is your English term?—to give him away! Ecks had grown alarmed, and was about to save his skin by confession to the authorities. Oh yes. Spring!’

‘Continue,’ said Perivale.

‘Yes—but from a certain point, to avoid being tedious,’ said the other. ‘I need not worry you with the story of our doings—it is sufficient to say that by eight o’clock last night we knew where Spring was to be found—at the Loup Gris, cleverly disguised as a venerable old man; he was a past master, Spring, at that sort of thing. Well, we made our arrangements. At nine o’clock, a party of our society descended upon the Loup Gris, seized Spring, and carried him safely away to a place of retreat which not all the police in Paris could discover, Monsieur Perivale—no, nor any of your Scotland Yard men, either. There he was immediately brought before our tribunal. His disguise was stripped off—very ingenious it was, even to his hunched back!—and he was left, not naked, certainly, but in his true form as Spring, or Winter, or Summer, or whatever his real name was—a matter which will never be known. Then, being formally accused, he was warned that nothing but a full and complete disclosure would avail him—he must tell all! Monsieur, he began with a lie, a vile lie!’

‘What?’ asked Perivale, eagerly.

‘That all he had done had been done in the interests of the society! Now, there he made a great mistake, for before we laid hands on him we knew he was guilty. We had already secured proofs, never mind how, that if we had not captured him, he would, before noon today, have been safely out of Paris. So all we were concerned with was to make ourselves acquainted with his doings, and he narrated them freely and with great plausibility, being under the impression—he was, like all criminals, a man of great vanity and conceit!—that he could succeed in justifying himself to us. I shall now tell you his story.’

‘That’s what I want,’ said Perivale, still more eagerly. ‘If it clears certain things up—’

‘You will see,’ continued the official. ‘According to Spring, he made the discovery that Auberge was a traitor, and not merely that, but an agent of your English police, and that instead of handing over our fifty thousand

pounds to the English bank to which he had been entrusted to carry it, he was about to place it, with a full disclosure of our plans, in the keeping of some high-placed English politician or official. Spring accordingly entered into an arrangement with Ecks, and into another with Auberge. The arrangement with Ecks was that he should follow Auberge to Folkestone, and should there act under his, Spring's directions. Spring himself, in accordance with his arrangement with Auberge, was also to go to Folkestone; he had told Auberge that he had some private business in that town on the Monday evening, and, just to know that Auberge had arrived there with the diamond in safety, had appointed a brief meeting with Auberge near the hotel on the Leas at which Spring meant to stay. Now, all that is Spring's story—whether he and Auberge were in collusion about the diamond' and the fifty thousand pounds no one will ever know—all that we can know is what Spring told in the hope that we, his judges, would accept it as a proof of his loyalty to our society. And that amounts to this: Spring arrived in Folkestone early in the evening of Monday, October 23. He engaged a room at a small private hotel on the Lees. He dined there. He had arranged to meet Auberge—they both knew that town very well—at half-past nine; Spring left his hotel to keep that appointment. Auberge was a little late, but they met. They walked about a while; Spring in his character of anxious part-proprietor, asked Auberge where the diamond was? Auberge told him that, for safety, he had secreted it in his bedroom at the Royal Pavilion Hotel. And where in the bedroom? In the left-hand side brass knob of the rail at the foot of the bed. Armed with this knowledge, and knowing, as he protested to us, that Auberge was about to betray the society on arriving in London, he lured Auberge to a path leading down the cliff, there—as he phrased it—removed him, and, having extracted from Auberge's pocket the wallet containing the banknotes, returned to the Leas.'

Perivale was listening eagerly, and beginning to understand matters. The connection between Spring and Ecks was now becoming plain.

'Yes—yes!' he said. 'And—afterwards?'

'On the Leas, near the little hotel, Spring, according to arrangement, met Ecks. He told Ecks—who had secreted himself somewhere since the arrival of the boat from Boulogne—to go down to the Royal Pavilion Hotel, and to engage a room for the night. He also told him where he, Ecks, would find the diamond in Auberge's room, and he furnished him with a skeleton key which would open the door—neither he nor Ecks knew, then, that Auberge

had left his key in the door. Ecks went off at once to do his part; Spring turned into his hotel. Next morning, at a very early hour, Spring left for Paris by way of Newhaven and Dieppe; Ecks left by way of Dover. They met in Paris that night, and Ecks, who, of course, had secured it without difficulty during his night's stay at the Royal Pavilion Hotel, handed over the diamond to Spring, who, as you know, already had our fifty thousand pounds' worth of English banknotes in his possession. So far, good—from their standpoint. But now came the hue-and-cry after Ecks. Followed on that Delardier's revelation to Spring and threat of exposure. Delardier had to be removed; Spring removed him. Then Spring suspected Ecks, and twenty-four hours ago, dogged Ecks from a lodging to the neighbourhood of the Prefecture, where, certain that Ecks was about to denounce him, he removed him, also. He was frank, very frank, about these removals, but, Monsieur Perivale, it was—eh?—all in the service and interests of our society. Oh, entirely. A most specious, plausible man, this Spring!'

'Your tribunal did not believe him?'

'Would you believe a cat whose whiskers are white with cream? We listened—incredulous! Not that we showed that. But—we knew! Knew all—before we listened to him. Nor did it profit him when he handed over to us what he had on him—carefully concealed: the money and the diamond!'

'Ah!' exclaimed Perivale. 'You secured them—both?'

'Both! It was his—what would you call it?—his last straw!'

'And it availed him nothing?'

'Nothing!'

Perivale glanced inquisitively at his companion.

'Tam curious,' he said. 'What happened?'

'It was the ordinary procedure in such cases,' said the other coolly. 'Everything was strictly en regle. He was informed that he had been proved inimical to the interests of the society and must die. He saw there was no mercy for him, and accepted his fate—calmly. He was given permission to smoke a cigarette while lots were drawn.'

'Lots!' exclaimed Perivale. 'As to—'

'As to who should perform the office of executioner,' replied the other. 'A necessity!'

'And—then?' asked Perivale.

'Then—why, then, he was shot!'

'You saw it?'

His companion looked up from his task of making another cigarette.

'It was I who shot him,' he replied. 'He died—instantaneously! Bah! Let us talk of something else! Monsieur Perivale, you will return to your country in the morning, is it not so? By the midday train from the Gare du Nord? Well, before you leave your hotel, you will receive a parcel from me. And here is another, a small thing, that I have for you—take my advice and hand it to Pelabos. Well—that is all! Turn from me a moment—open your little packet!'

Perivale did as he was bidden, and, turning in his seat, unrolled various wrappings of paper until he came to a wad of cotton wool. In that nestled a diamond—a thing of fire.

He twisted sharply towards his companion. But the man of the secret society was vanishing through the door, and Perivale made no effort to stop him.

27
The Umbrella

Perivale found it difficult to sleep that night; he had, indeed, known little of sleep when morning came. But he had made up his mind what to do about the diamond. Budini was still in the hotel, and to Budini, in the presence of Pelabos, he handed the diamond over, telling them that it had been placed in his hands for the purpose, and that he washed those same hands of all further connection with the affair; in his opinion, he said, Spring would never be heard of again.

'There is no need to inquire further, my friend,' said Pelabos. 'I comprehend more than you think! That society that we know of, eh? It has dealt with Spring—and it delivers up what is not its property to you! Well! did I not say that those others would do our work? And—you know nothing? Well again, then—one has liberty to guess!'

Perivale had no inclination for more guesswork; he wanted to get away—the taste of his midnight interview was still nasty in his mouth. But as he made his preparations for departure and hurried Cripstone and Lawson in theirs, the parcel which the secret society official had spoken of was brought to him—an affair in brown paper, a yard long, a few inches round.

'What on earth can this be?' he asked of Lawson, who was in his room, as he stripped off the wrappings. 'Good Lord! an umbrella!'

'Jolly good one, too,' said Lawson. 'But there's a note fallen out.'

Perivale picked up the note and read.

> 'You may like to preserve as a souvenir the weapon with which the man you know of killed his victims.'

He turned, staring, at Lawson.

'Weapon!' he exclaimed, wonderingly. 'What weapon! It's an umbrella—an ordinary silk umbrella! Yet—read that note!'

Lawson read—exclaimed—picked up the umbrella—stared at it from top to bottom.

'By gad, though, I see it!' he shouted suddenly. 'Look here, Perivale, do you notice that? The ferrule end of the umbrella is unusually long—eight inches long at least! And it's unusually thick—see, it screws off! And—now, look there!'

And as Perivale watched, Lawson screwed off the false covering of the ferrule, and revealed inside a three-cornered stiletto, every edge of which was sharp as a Sheffield blade.